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interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary  
living.*

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## Editorial

Last October the WEF Theological Commission launched a 3 year international study programme on a number of theological and missiological issues crucial to evangelical witness in our contemporary global society. In an exciting age of fresh theological search for truth and relevance in a pluralistic but disintegrating world we are again pressed to respond

to questions about the authority of the Scriptures and their interpretation. Hermeneutics can no longer be limited to understanding and interpreting the text, but must speak to the functioning of cultural and psychological factors in interpreting the Word of God. Again, similar questions are raised when we endeavour to evaluate Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. Are changes since Vatican II of substance or only cosmetic? Is it sufficient to speak of evangelising *nominal* Roman Catholics only and must converts be encouraged to join Protestant churches?

During 1980 the WCC at Melbourne focused on the liberation of the poor and oppressed and the LCWE at Pattaya on reaching the un-evangelised and the lost. Building on the Theological Consultations at High Leigh earlier in the year the Theological Commission is now contextualising the debate on the evangelisation of the urban and rural poor, believing that the coming decades will see many of the world's poor press into the Kingdom. Further we believe that apart from a gospel that changes the human nature of both rich and poor, the rising struggle for social justice will fail to eliminate poverty and injustice or effectively change the corrupt institutions of society. This brings us to the equally urgent need for inner renewal in the life and mission of the Church. What part should theological education play in this renewal? How should the churches respond to oppression, political power and the religious persecution of minorities? The issues of Church and State are becoming critical as man's cruelty against man spreads from nation to nation.

This number and the forthcoming numbers of ERT will seek to explore these frontiers. We invite you to share in this search.

## **Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends**

**D. A. Carson**

*Reprinted from Themelios, January 1980, with permission*

*During 1980 the Theological Commission initiated an international study programme on hermeneutics, believing this subject to be one of the most crucial issues confronting evangelicals today. Under the guidance of the study unit, Faith and Church, the study programme will culminate in a working conference June 1983 and in the publication of a wide range of documents. To encourage evangelicals to enter into a more serious dialogue with each other and with other Christians we will publish articles covering different perspectives of the subject.*

(Editor)

### **BACKGROUND**

The recent explosion of interest in hermeneutics should not be taken to mean that the subject was of no concern before 1950. One of the most profitable ways for the student to

approach the subject is by studying its history.<sup>1</sup> Every debate in the history of the Church is conditioned in part by hermeneutical considerations; and those happy souls who naively think they can without loss avoid such considerations and ‘just believe the Bible’ in fact adopt all sorts of hermeneutical stances unawares. Although hermeneutical positions *alone* do not *necessarily* determine one’s theological conclusions in advance, the rôle they play is much larger than is often allowed.

Especially in the North American context, evangelicals still rely very largely on the conservative works of Ramm<sup>2</sup> and Mickelsen,<sup>3</sup> and to some extent on the reprints of Berkhof<sup>4</sup> and Terry.<sup>5</sup> These works are largely unknown outside North American evangelical circles: a recent and invaluable bibliography, prepared in Britain,<sup>6</sup> lists only Mickelsen. Nevertheless these books have some important things to say, however dated they may be. They treat the Scriptures as the given, the thing to be studied, and then trace out the principles by which various forms, figures and topics in the Scripture should be understood—parables, diverse poetical forms, typology, apocalyptic language, assorted figures of speech, riddles and fables. Moreover they include some reflection on the use of the Bible for establishing doctrine, and on the piety, devotion or spirituality of the interpreter engaged in his hermeneutical task. Hermeneutics in these works is conceived primarily as the enunciation of principles of interpreting the sacred text, principles largely derived from previously established epistemological, philological and literary categories.

In the past, evangelical writers have sometimes designated their approach to interpreting the Bible as ‘grammatico-historical’ exegesis, over against the ‘historical-critical’ method; but by and large the four works cited avoid the pitfalls implicit in such distinctions. Ramm, for instance, takes pains to defend the word ‘critical’, defining it to mean ‘that *any interpretation of Scripture must have adequate justification*. The grounds for the interpretation *must be made explicit*’,<sup>7</sup> whether these grounds are lexical, historical, grammatical, theological, geographical, or whatever. For Ramm, the critical approach stands in opposition, not to orthodoxy, but to highly personal interpretations, or to interpretations determined arbitrarily, dogmatically, or speculatively.

These works are dated (Mickelsen’s less so); but their understanding of hermeneutics as the study of principles used to interpret the given text to determine its meaning, in a simple subject-object relationship, constitutes both their strength and their weakness. Their

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the 1885 Bampton Lectures of F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1886); and, more recently, R. M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> A. B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (London: Evangelical Press, 1950).

<sup>5</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, repr. 1974).

<sup>6</sup> *Viz.*, the bibliography at the end of *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. H. Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.101.

approach may appear simplistic in the light of the later developments I shall survey in a moment, but they preserve some invaluable emphasis too easily sacrificed on the altar of hermeneutical fads for which *exclusive* claims are temporarily made. It is very refreshing to observe that in a very recent book, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching*,<sup>8</sup> Robert H. Stein focuses attention on some of the same interpretive questions as these older books, albeit in an up-to-date context.

For introductory surveys of developments in hermeneutics, largely outside evangelical circles,<sup>9</sup> one may turn with profit to the books by C. E. Braaten,<sup>10</sup> W. G. Doty,<sup>11</sup> and R. W. Funk.<sup>12</sup> In what follows I shall survey five large areas of discussion in contemporary hermeneutical debates, but restrict bibliography to representative works. The presentation will be largely descriptive, only occasionally evaluative, until the concluding section, which attempts to assess these developments.

## MODERN LITERARY TOOLS

Seventeen years ago Otto Kaiser and Werner G. Kümmel collaborated to write a little book which, in English translation, was titled, *Exegetical Method: A Student's Handbook*.<sup>13</sup> Although the book avoided terms like 'source criticism', 'form criticism', 'tradition criticism', 'redaction criticism', 'audience criticism', and the like, in fact it included a gentle, low-key introduction to these and other literary tools. The same year that the English translation put in an appearance, George Eldon Ladd came out with his *The New Testament and Criticism*,<sup>14</sup> essentially a competent effort to introduce conservative students to the legitimate aspects of literary criticism, coupled with the occasional warning about the dangers. Over the years, several publications have attempted to introduce students to one or more of the modern

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<sup>8</sup> (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978.)

<sup>9</sup> Within evangelical circles, little development has taken place in the area of hermeneutics, aside from the work of a handful of men. What has been written has often been for in-house consumption, not infrequently in the area of prophecy: e.g. Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), a book as remarkable for its ignorance of primary sources as for its *non sequiturs*; J. Wilmot, *Inspired Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Swengel: Reiner, 1975), a book with a very different eschatological perspective, but sometimes guilty of generating more heat than light. Even the more responsible books in the area are designed primarily for lay persons: e.g. P. E. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Carl E. Armerding and W. Ward Casque (eds.) *Dreams, Visions and Oracles: The Layman's Guide to Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> C. E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966).

<sup>11</sup> W. G. Doty, *Contemporary New Testament Interpretation* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> R. W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and the Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>13</sup> (Tr. E. V. N. Goetchius; New York: Seabury, 1967; German, 1963.)

<sup>14</sup> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967.)

literary ‘criticisms’, no series being as widely received as the one published by Fortress.<sup>15</sup> Now, I. Howard Marshall has edited a symposium entitled *New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Principles and Methods*.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to grasp the development that this book represents. When these literary tools were first introduced, they did not make their appearance as hermeneutical principles but as ways of getting behind the Gospels as we have them in order to illumine the ‘tunnel’ period and perhaps learn something more about the historical Jesus. To use these tools at that stage usually meant buying into a large conceptual framework concerning the descent of the tradition—a framework with which evangelicals (and many others, for that matter) were bound to differ.

Yet in the case of the Synoptic Gospels, at least, we have enough comparative material to be certain there are literary borrowings; identifiable forms whose history can be traced, however tentatively; and demonstrable rearranging and shaping of the pericopae to support certain theological ends. The literary ‘criticisms’ were not necessarily evil after all; they became increasingly acceptable as *exegetical* tools, devices to enable us better to understand the text.

Now, however, we have moved one stage further. Traditionally, ‘exegesis’ was the actual study of the text in order to determine its meaning, and ‘hermeneutics’ the principles by which one attempted to perform ‘exegesis’. But Marshall’s book is subtitled, *Essays in Principles and Methods*: have the literary ‘criticisms’ been upgraded to the status of hermeneutical principles or has the word ‘hermeneutics’ broadened its semantic range? It is no accident that Marshall, in introducing the questions to be studied by the contributors, calls them ‘hermeneutical questions’.<sup>17</sup> Of course, since in the traditional distinction both ‘exegesis’ and ‘hermeneutics’ deal with the interpretation of Scripture, there is some legitimate semantic overlap; but we shall discover that one of the corollaries of modern ‘hermeneutical’ debate is that the word ‘hermeneutics’ is skidding around on an increasingly broad semantic field.

More than the semantic range of a word is at stake; for as ‘literary tools’ become ‘hermeneutical principles’, they are upgraded not simply in dignity and in their ability to dominate the discussion, but in their ability to dominate what is legitimate in interpretation. That is not itself bad; but the situation is worsened by the fact that these ‘hermeneutical principles’ are frequently handled, outside believing circles, as if they enable us to practise our interpretive skills with such objective distance that we never come under the authority of the God whose Word is being interpreted, and never consider other personal, moral and spiritual factors which have no less ‘hermeneutical’ influence in our attempts to interpret the text. And not all the contributors to this volume have escaped these malign influences.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Some of these have been published in the UK by SPCK: e.g. N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (London: SPCK, 1970); cf. also E. V. McKnight, *What is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969). Cf. also R. S. Barbour, *Traditio-Historical Criticism of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1972).

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> cf. especially V. Poythress, ‘New Testament Interpretation,’ *WTJ* 41 (1978–79), 190–201.

## THE NEW HERMENEUTIC

For the student brought up on traditional hermeneutics, the 'new hermeneutic' is an extremely difficult subject to get hold of. The writings of Gadamer, Fuchs, Ebeling<sup>19</sup> and others are not easy, even in English translation; and many of their essays have not been translated. English expositions of the new hermeneutic have been prepared by, *inter alios*, Robinson and Cobb<sup>20</sup> and by Walter Wink.<sup>21</sup> Two articles by A. C. Thiselton<sup>22</sup> and another by Richard B. Gaffin<sup>23</sup> provide helpful introductions to the subject.

According to the exponents of the new hermeneutic, the starting point for understanding any text is the recognition of the common humanity and historicity of the text's author and the text's interpreter. The point was made by Schleiermacher, and is related to Bultmann's conception of *Vorverständnis*. As developed by Bultmann's students, this common historicity dismisses the nineteenth-century claims to sheer objectivity in interpretation, and establishes a pattern of dialogue: the interpreter asks questions of the text out of his own psychological, historical, cultural limitations, and finds that the text, in answering his questions subtly *changes* his psychological, historical, cultural condition. As a result, the next round of questions posed by the interpreter is somewhat different—as indeed are the answers and implicit questions provided by the text. This sets up a 'hermeneutical circle'. The interpreter recognizes the 'distance' between himself and the text (not least in documents written twenty centuries or more before he was born, in different languages and cultures!), and seeks to come to common horizons with the author of the text by means of this dialogue.

So far, so good. However, as this new hermeneutic is normally expounded, both the interpreter *and the text* are swallowed up in a sea of historical relativity. In interpreting the text, the interpreter finds that the text interprets him. As horizons are increasingly shared and an *Einverständnis* (Fuchs' term, rendered either by 'common understanding' or by 'empathy') develops, the text is capable of grasping hold of the interpreter and radically altering his thinking by introducing something shocking and unexpected. Fuchs treats the

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<sup>19</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975). Of the many works by Fuchs and Ebeling, cf. esp.: E. Fuchs, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. I: *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie: Die existentielle Interpretation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965); *idem*, *Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1970); *idem*, several essays in *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1964); G. Ebeling, *God and Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967); *idem*, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (London: Collins, 1973); *idem*, several essays in *Word and Faith* (London: SCM, 1963).

<sup>20</sup> James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb (eds.), *The New Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964). Cf. also P. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

<sup>21</sup> W. Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Towards a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

<sup>22</sup> A. C. Thiselton, 'Explain etc.' in *NIDNTT* 1, esp. pp.582–584; *idem*, 'The New Hermeneutic,' in I. H. Marshall (ed.), *New Testament Interpretation*, *op. cit.*, pp.308–33.

<sup>23</sup> 'Contemporary Hermeneutics and the Study of the New Testament,' in J. H. Skilton (ed.), *Studying the New Testament Today* (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), pp.3–18.

parables in particular this way. The language of the text becomes a 'language-event' (*Sprachereignis*) by challenging the interpreter toward 'authentic human existence'. Moreover, the 'hermeneutical circle' thus set up has no necessary *terminus*: it is not the objective meaning of the text that is the goal, since the text is considered to be no more 'objective' than the interpreter. The goal is that moment of encounter between text and interpreter in which the 'meaning' *occurs* or *takes place*: that is, it is the encounter between text and interpreter in which the interpreter hears and responds to some claim upon his person. Obviously that might be a different thing for a different person, or different things for the same person at different times, or different things for different generations of students of Scripture. Moreover, to share common horizons does not entail shared world-views. The 'distance' between text and interpreter is, as I have indicated, repeatedly stressed.<sup>24</sup> A Bultmann may discount the possibility of supernatural phenomena in coming to grips with texts abounding in reports of such phenomena; but modern exponents of the new hermeneutic would point out not only that the adoption of supernatural categories by the first century writers is historically conditioned but so also is Bultmann's rejection of the same. It makes no difference: provided Bultmann and the text develop *Einverständnis*, it is possible for *Sprachereignis* to take place. This is the true 'meaning' of the text; and it is the goal of the new hermeneutic.

This painfully brief summary of the new hermeneutic verges on the simplistic; yet it should be obvious that there is much of merit in these developments, even if there is not less of demerit. The new hermeneutic is certainly a welcome antidote to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century belief in the impartiality and neutrality of the interpreter, the Enlightenment commitment not only to human autonomy but also to the capacity of human reason to achieve, by itself, objective knowledge. Moreover, the new hermeneutic, when utilized within a less sceptical framework, offers valuable insights into the parables and other forms of biblical language, enabling us to sense again the shock of the first hearers, the first readers of Scripture. The danger engendered by our very familiarity with them is thereby partially overcome.

Nevertheless it must be clearly understood that the term 'hermeneutics' (or, to be pedantic, 'hermeneutic') is undergoing a considerable semantic shift. We are now no longer interested in the principles whereby an interpreter attempts to understand the meaning of a text within its original context. Rather, hermeneutics becomes the discipline by which we examine how a thought or event in one cultural and religious context becomes understandable in another cultural and religious context. In Thiselton's terms, 'Whilst the new hermeneutic rightly faces the problem of how the interpreter may understand the text of the New Testament more *deeply* and *creatively*, Fuchs and Ebeling are *less concerned about how he may understand it correctly*.'<sup>25</sup> Of course, to word a criticism of the new hermeneutic in this way is to accept what is regularly denied, *viz.* that there is a 'correct' interpretation to be pursued. If the new hermeneutic and her twin sister the new history have delivered us from believing in our own omniscience and impartiality, they must not be

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<sup>24</sup> This is one of the chief characteristics of the new hermeneutic, according to C. F. Evans, 'Hermeneutics,' *Epworth Review* 2 (1975), 81–93.

<sup>25</sup> A. C. Thiselton, 'The New Hermeneutic,' *art. cit.*, p.323. One cannot help wryly observing that the editor of this volume, I. H. Marshall, has wisely included this essay not under the second section, 'The Use of Critical Methods in Interpretation', nor under the third, 'The Task of Exegesis', but under the fourth 'The New Testament and the Modern Reader'.



permitted to seduce us into thinking we can enjoy *no* true and certain knowledge of objective truths and events. If they have delivered us from the false notion that a historical record may be exhaustively true (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) and have taught us that historical records, including the documents which constitute Scripture, are at best partial statements, partial interpretations; nevertheless they must not be permitted to seduce us into thinking that partial knowledge is necessarily false knowledge. Finite human beings may know truly, even if they cannot know exhaustively. The study of history is the study of objective phenomena, akin to geology if not to physics, as Passmore has brilliantly argued.<sup>26</sup>

It follows, then, that the new hermeneutic pursues ‘what is true for me’ at the expense of ‘what is true’. Theology proper becomes impossible. It is not for nothing that the first volume of Fuchs’ collected essays bears for its subtitle *Die existentielle Interpretation*. Among the things overlooked by such an approach is the possibility that the transcendent, personal God has chosen to reveal himself at historical intervals in both events and in propositions. At the strictly hermeneutical level, the exponents of the new hermeneutic overlook the crucial distinctions between ‘meaning’ and ‘significance’ ably advanced by Hirsch.<sup>27</sup> To say that the ‘meaning’ of such and such a text is the claim it makes upon me in the *Sprachereignis* of the hermeneutical encounter is to adopt an approach which, were it applied to the writings of the exponents of the new hermeneutic, would dissolve their work in a sea of subjectivity. They have written to be understood, to convey information and theories which they regard as true and important: is it too much to suppose that some of the biblical writers entertained similar intentions? And when we accept the Scriptures’ own perspective and hold that God himself addresses us by the words of Scripture, it does not seem too bold to think that God has something to say—that is, that there is intent in the text, meaning which must be discovered, however many secondary significances there may be and however far such secondary significances may sometimes lead us astray from that meaning. If the new hermeneutic forces us to an awareness of these diverse significances, and helps us hear the Word of God afresh by challenging our alleged objectivity, it will have served us well. But if the new hermeneutic denies that writers, including God, have intent and can convey meaning, it is but another faddish aberration in theology.

## CANON CRITICISM AND HERMENEUTICS

One may wonder why canon criticism and hermeneutics belong together. Perhaps they wouldn’t, had it not been for the fact that J. A. Sanders, one of the leading proponents of canon criticism, was asked to write the article on ‘Hermeneutics’ in the new *Supplement* to IDB.

Sanders claims that, as used today, the term ‘hermeneutics’ ‘signifies (1) the principles, rules, and techniques whereby the interpreter of a text attempts to understand it in its original context (i.e., the classical definition); (2) the science of discerning how a thought or

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<sup>26</sup> J. A. Passmore, ‘The Objectivity of History,’ in W. H. Dray, *Philosophical Analysis and History* (New York/London: Harper and Row, 1966), pp.75–94. Cf. also the important work by Earl R. MacCormac, *Metaphor and Myth in Science and Religion* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1967). Cf. also his *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

event in one cultural context may be understood in a different cultural context (i.e., a definition associated with the new hermeneutic); and (3) the art of making the transfer (the direction in which Sanders himself is moving).'<sup>28</sup>

After sketching in the rise of the new hermeneutic, Sanders insists that the task today, the challenge ahead, is 'canonical hermeneutics'<sup>29</sup> Essentially, this is the study of the means whereby early authoritative traditions were utilized by Israel (in the Old Testament) and the Church (in the New Testament) to span the gaps of time and culture to be re-formed according to the needs of the new believing communities. The process itself is as canonical as the traditions found in the canon. *Canonical* hermeneutics is thus 'the means whereby early believing communities pursued, and later believing communities may yet pursue, the integrity (oneness) of God, both ontological and ethical.'<sup>30</sup>

It would take us too far afield to detail the principles and rules which Sanders enumerates. What must be pointed out, however, is that Sanders focuses not on what the text says, but on how the traditions are transformed from generation to generation. 'Hermeneutics', he writes, 'is as much concerned with the contexts in which biblical texts were and are read or recited as with the texts themselves. It is in this sense that one must insist that the Bible is not the Word of God. The Word is the point that is made in the conjunction of text and context, whether in antiquity or at any subsequent time. Discernment of context, whether then or now, is thus crucial to biblical interpretation.'<sup>31</sup>

Sanders is partly right in what he affirms, and certainly wrong in what he denies. His emphasis on keeping an eye on contexts is most helpful, especially from the pastoral point of view. A man careless in prayer might better hear [Luke 18](#) than [Matthew 6](#); a man given to thinking that God hears him and blesses him in proportion to his much speaking, the reverse. Recently Longenecker has studied the 'faith of Abraham' theme in the New Testament and, noting the rich diversity of emphasis, has underscored the 'circumstantial' nature of the New Testament documents.<sup>32</sup> But to establish as normative the *changes* in tradition, and not the content (with all due regard for the varying contexts) is certainly a false step. Contexts are not as easy to retrieve as Sanders intimates. Moreover, Sanders' approach looks good when it is applied to attitudes and morals, but it is extremely difficult to see how it could establish much doctrine—which is the first purpose of Scripture to be listed at [2 Tim. 3:16](#).

In any case, the term 'hermeneutics' as Sanders wants us to use it establishes principles, not for understanding or obeying the text per se, but for isolating 'conjunctions of text and context' in such a way that modern parallels may be guided aright. However, unless the text

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<sup>28</sup> IDB *Supp.*, p.402. The rich literature on canon criticism, springing in part from the biblical theology movement, is too extensive to be treated here. But I cannot forbear to mention the latest (and magisterial) volume by Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). This substantial work is immensely suggestive; but it arrived too late for consideration in this paper.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.403.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.404.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> R. N. Longenecker, 'The "Faith of Abraham" Theme in Paul, James and Hebrews: A Study in the Circumstantial Nature of New Testament Teaching,' *JETS* 20 (1977), 203–312.

itself is normative in some sense, it is not easy to believe that the *conjunction* of text and context should have any normative status or authoritative value.

## STRUCTURALISM

For the unwary, structuralism is a minefield of explosive and sensitive topics, laced with the barbed wire of an esoteric language and pitted with deep unknowns. I cannot hope to introduce the subject here; but fortunately three recent essays, one of them in the pages of an earlier number of *Themelios*, have undertaken the challenge.<sup>33</sup> These three essays are not redundant: structuralism is such a vast field, and the ways of approaching it so numerous, that perhaps it is not too surprising how little they overlap. To plumb the subject it is necessary to go back at least as far as de Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, and, in linguistics, to the work of Noam Chomsky.<sup>34</sup> From there one may move forward to a veritable flood of literature.

Structuralism is extraordinarily difficult to define. At one level it does little more than examine literary structures (e.g. chiasm, repetition, various kinds of narrative interchange), often in terms of set rôles, schematized plots, and binary oppositions, in order the better to understand a biblical passage.<sup>36</sup> As such it becomes another hermeneutical tool, nothing more. However, the nerve centre of structuralism is at the other end of the spectrum. This radical structuralism, if I may so label it, no longer assumes that truth from Scripture (or any other piece of writing) derives from the intent of its authors, and that such intent may be discovered by patient, painstaking literary and historical analysis. Structuralism, or structural analysis, seeks truth at quite another level. Structuralists hold that the study of the relationships among words and themes reveals codes, codes which reflect the 'deep structures' of the human brain and which, potentially, could enable researchers to map the human mind. As these codes are revealed most clearly in language, the relationship between linguistics and structuralism is a very close one. Structural analysts of the extreme sort disavow the historical-critical method,<sup>37</sup> focus on the text as a whole made up of constituent parts which may be analyzed and classified, in the hope of decoding the text into a series of structures of increasing abstraction, leading ultimately to the deep structures. Here there is

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<sup>33</sup> V. Poythress, 'Structuralism and Biblical Studies,' *JETS* 21 (1978), 221–37; A. C. Thiselton, 'Keeping up with Recent Studies II. Structuralism and Biblical Studies: Method or Ideology?' *ExpT* 89 (1977–78), 329–35; Carl Armerding, 'Structural Analysis,' *Themelios* 4 (1979), pp.96–104. Cf. also V. Poythress, 'Philosophical Roots of Phenomenological and Structuralist Literary Criticism,' *WTJ* 41 (1978–79), 165–171.

<sup>34</sup> I cannot forbear to mention also a virulent attack on the latter: I. Robinson, *The New Grammarians' Funeral: A critique of Noam Chomsky's linguistics* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975).

<sup>36</sup> E.g., B. Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text-Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1–11 and 4:1–42* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1974). Not a few of the essays appearing in *Semeia* are of this sort. Cf. also the studies by P. Auffret which have appeared from time to time in *NTS*, *VT*, *RevQum* and elsewhere.

<sup>37</sup> One of the strongest statements to this effect is by B. W. Kovacs, 'Philosophical Foundations for Structuralism,' *Semeia* 10 (1978), 85–105.

strong, anti-historical bias, dismissal of diachronics, and little concern with what the text says at the 'surface' level.

The literature already cited attempts to list some of the strengths and weaknesses of structuralism: I shall not repeat them here. There are only two things I want to emphasize. The first is that structuralism in its radical form is offering a total package, a wholistic method of approaching Scripture (and other literature) which at its most virulent renders the historical irrelevant and provides a *method* for avoiding the transcendent at every level. The second is perhaps more important yet. So far proponents of existential hermeneutics and the new hermeneutic have denied the relevance of structural analysis to their own studies and see it merely as an alternative way of approaching the text. Recently, however, Edgar V. McKnight, in a brilliant book entitled *Meaning in Texts: The Historical Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutics*,<sup>38</sup> has convincingly shown how the two approaches are necessarily linked. Such linking, as it is worked out in the future, will offer our generation some of the toughest hermeneutical challenges ever faced.

Once again it is worth stressing that I am referring only to one extreme but vociferous group of structuralists. As far as I am able to discern, most structural analysts—e.g. the majority of those contributing specific examples to *Semeia*—have not developed an exclusive approach to structuralism which turns more on ideology than method. Despite the arbitrariness of much structural exegesis, there are nevertheless important lessons to be learned; and the field is wide open for mature, programmatic assessment.<sup>39</sup> Just as we refuse to think that we have a corner on all truth, we must equally refuse to think that we have nothing to learn from developments of a hermeneutical nature.

## THE MAIER/STUHLMACHER DEBATE

Gerhard Maier and Peter Stuhlmacher have for some time been involved in an important debate over the historical-critical method. Each man has a book on the subject, translated into English, where the essence of his position is presented,<sup>40</sup> although in fact the debate has waged beyond the pages of the two books.<sup>41</sup>

Both of these books deserve thoughtful reading. Maier argues that the historical-critical method is an invalid approach to the Bible because it is not suited to its subject matter, viz. divine revelation. The problem, he affirms, is that the historical-critical method becomes the historical-critical method: i.e., the emphasis comes to be placed on the interpreter's autonomous intellect and assessment of what he feels he can or cannot accept from God. This inevitably leads to some form of 'canon within the canon', a concept which Maier devastatingly exposes for the ambiguous and useless category it is.

The only proper approach to the Bible is to accept its claim and operate on that basis. Twice he refers to [John 7:17](#) as the touchstone of his approach: *credo ut intellegam* (I believe

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<sup>38</sup> (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978.)

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the preliminary conclusions of A. C. Thiselton, 'Keeping up,' *art. cit.*, pp.334f.

<sup>40</sup> G. Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977); P. Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>41</sup> Earlier essays were published in German in *ZTK* and *ZNW*; and a continuing debate has been carried on in *Theologische Beiträge*.

in order to understand), he insists; not *credo, quia intellego* (I believe because I understand).<sup>42</sup> Maier in these passages comes perilously close to basing his adoption of the position that all of the canon is itself the very Word of God, on his understanding of [John 7:17](#). John Piper, in criticizing Maier in this regard,<sup>43</sup> is correct in pointing out that [John 7:17](#) in its context has nothing to do with *establishing normative Scripture*, but with a person's desires in discerning whether or not Jesus' teachings are in conformity with the will of God already revealed, but perhaps Piper is over-reacting when he accuses Maier of a simplistic fideism which is not guided by knowledge. Maier, after all, includes substantial sections of his book, proportionately speaking, to what the Scriptures claim for themselves, what the scope of the canon is, how to approach alleged contradictions and scientific errors, and the like.

What Maier wants to do is replace the historical-critical method with what he calls the 'historical-biblical' method. He concludes his volume by outlining the specific elements he defines as constitutive of the method.

Peter Stuhlmacher is scarcely less upset with recent developments in theology than Maier himself; yet he reserves his strongest language for disagreement with Maier. Stuhlmacher wants to preserve the historical-critical method, but with two important caveats. He insists that the notion of absolute 'objectivity' be scrapped (here he leans on Schleiermacher and Gadamer); and he appeals for what he calls a 'hermeneutics of consent'. By this he means that the historical-critical method must not be applied to the Bible in such a way that analogical arguments rule out a priori the possibility of supernatural events, of unique events; rather, the interpreter 'consents' to leave himself open to the possibility of 'transcendence'. Stuhlmacher represents a growing movement in Germany against the sterility of existential theology.

What shall we say of the profound differences that divide these two men? Maier, it is true, adopts a stance vis-à-vis the Scriptures which is closer to the traditional evangelical position than is Stuhlmacher's; but that does not mean his entire position is thereby vindicated.

I suspect that at least part of the difference between the two positions turns on definition and on some difficult problems in epistemology. If the historical-critical method *necessarily* means that the interpreter claims independent authority over the text *in such a way as to exclude the possibility* that he might come to the position where he understands the text to be nothing less than the very Word of God, with absolute authority over him, then the historical-critical method is invalid: it is too limiting. If, however, 'historical-critical method' be understood in a way akin to that proposed by Ramm in the first section of this paper (and n.7), it is difficult to see why either Maier or Stuhlmacher would object to the term. Maier is loading the expression 'historical-critical method' with unsatisfactory conclusions; but other men may use the same method without demonstrable *methodological* distinctions, and come out with conclusions perfectly acceptable to Maier. Is it the method per se that Maier finds objectionable, or its results in the hands of most (but not all) of its practitioners? Is it the historical-critical method that is offensive, or the claims to intellectual autonomy that are the heritage of the Enlightenment?

To put the matter this way raises a host of epistemological problems about how we came to know that the Bible is indeed the very Word of God; but it enables us to detect that,

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<sup>42</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp.23, 56.

<sup>43</sup> J. Piper, 'A Reply to Gerhard Maier: A Review Article,' *JETS* 22 (1979), 79–85.

terminological problems aside, there are probably few *strictly hermeneutical* (in the classical sense) questions which divide Maier and Stuhlmacher. What divides them is that one holds the position that the entire canon is the Word of God, while the other, fighting against extreme scepticism, allows for the possibility of meeting transcendence in Scripture but does not think it justifiable to posit a traditional doctrine of Scripture. *The problem is that both men camouflage their essential doctrinal differences and choose to meet in the hermeneutical arena instead*, despite the fact that their essential differences of opinion are only marginally hermeneutical. From the point of view of a more traditional definition of hermeneutics, both men are confusing hermeneutics with the results of hermeneutics. Their early hermeneutical *results* become fresh hermeneutical *controls*: i.e. both men implicitly accept the validity of the 'hermeneutical circle' and therefore see the entire debate in terms of hermeneutics; but such hermeneutics is no longer essentially methodological, but includes every factor which influences the interpreter to come to an interpretive decision.

One of the immediate effects, of course, is that 'hermeneutics' is again enlarged in its semantic range. It is true that one's beliefs about the Bible will at many points affect how one will interpret the Bible; and in this sense such beliefs have a hermeneutical function. But clearly, this means we have arrived at the place where almost anything—one's presuppositions, one's literary tools, everything one has learned so far (true or false), one's sleep the night before—might be meaningfully labelled 'hermeneutical'. But equally clearly, such 'hermeneutical' factors, as influential as they might be, are not tools or principles independent of the interpreter; rather, they are *everything* that prompts an exegetical or interpretive decision. But at that point the term 'hermeneutics' has become so broad as to be well-nigh meaningless. Certainly it is no longer an appropriate term for referring to a distinct discipline. And that, I submit, is one of the painful lessons to be learned from the Maier/Stuhlmacher debate.

## INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT

I am not referring by this heading to the peculiar problems surrounding Old Testament interpretation which face the modern interpreter,<sup>44</sup> but to the manner in which the Old Testament is interpreted both by early Jewish writers and by the New Testament. For a long time the most popular category employed by Christian writers assessing the latter problem was 'typology'.<sup>45</sup> Now however our ears ring with words like *peshet*, *midrash*, *halakah*, *haggadah*, *gal wahomer*, and the like.

In principle, the study of how the Old Testament is used by writers roughly contemporary with the New Testament writers promises significant results. This is one of the reasons why the Dead Sea Scrolls are so important,<sup>46</sup> and why the books by Daube,<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Issues confronted, for example, by C. Westermann (ed.), *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), or by A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Vom Verstehen des Alten Testaments: Eine Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the reprint of P. Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1975). Cf. also the classic by L. Goppelt, *Typos: Die typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, repr. 1973).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. esp. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (London: Tyndale, 1960).

<sup>47</sup> D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone Press, 1956).

Doeve,<sup>48</sup> Longenecker<sup>49</sup> and others make important advances along the right lines. These works have been followed up by very competent specialized studies.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, three cautions are needed. The first is that the literary categories are ill-defined, and used variously by different scholars. One of the best features of a recent doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of St. Andrews is its tracing of the range of meanings attributed to *midrash*.<sup>51</sup> Similar semantic range can easily be detected for *peshar* and for other words.

The second caution comes from Walter C. Kaiser. Over the years Kaiser has published a number of essays<sup>52</sup> warning students of Scripture against applying the *middoth* (rules of interpretation) so indiscriminately to the New Testament writers as to be left with connections between the Old and New Testaments less univocal than the New Testament writers perceive them to be. Kaiser has recently put together his total perspective in a readable book.<sup>53</sup> One need not heed every aspect of his argument to profit from his warning.

The final caution is that, once again, use of these comparative materials does not itself guarantee faultless hermeneutics or invariably agreed results. One need only compare the work of, say Longenecker,<sup>54</sup> with that of Lindars,<sup>55</sup> to find the point well made. Nevertheless there is much work to be done in this area by students who will submerge themselves in the several related but highly technical fields where competence must be achieved before significant contributions can be made.

## SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

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<sup>48</sup> J. W. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1954).

<sup>49</sup> R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the brief bibliography in I. H. Marshall, *op. cit.*, 379f.; to which one must at least add many of the essays by E. Earle Ellis in *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1978).

<sup>51</sup> Douglas John Moo, 'The Use of the Old Testament in the Passion Texts of the Gospels' (unpublished PhD dissertation, St. Andrews, 1979).

<sup>52</sup> E.g. 'The Current Crisis in Exegesis and the Apostolic Use of [Deuteronomy 25:4](#) in [1 Corinthians 9:8–10](#), ' *JETS* 21 (1978), 3–18; 'The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles ([Amos 9:9–15](#) and [Acts 15:13–18](#)): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,' *JETS* 20 (1977), 97–111.

<sup>53</sup> W.C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). The book, of course, deals with more than this one hermeneutical question; but this hermeneutical question is everywhere presupposed and occasionally enunciated.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (London: SCM, 1961).

1. Hermeneutics is a growing discipline, bursting its borders in several directions. It is an important and fast-paced area of study which urgently needs the close attention of evangelical students.

2. Hermeneutics is a slippery discipline, not least because the terms keep changing definition. Some of this terminological disarray stems from the legitimate growth of the discipline; but some of it springs from the imposition of alien ideologies onto the biblical data.

3. Hermeneutics is raising difficult questions in the areas of object/ subject relations, historical particularity vs. historical relativity, and Jewish hermeneutics applied to the interpretation of the Old Testament.

4. Some movements with hermeneutical ramifications have developed somewhat exclusivistic attitudes or (otherwise put) a kind of inner ring syndrome. Structuralism for instance, often stumbles into this pitfall. Such an attitude is to be strenuously avoided: it is not axiomatic that one or two hermeneutical methods may justly claim either exclusive rights or sufficient power to exclude some other methods.

5. Although no particular *hermeneutical method* (in the traditional sense) *in itself* guarantees either heterodox or orthodox results, nevertheless each such method at least recognizes that there is a meaning to be discovered, however difficult that might be. But 'hermeneutics' in some of its modern usage is so irretrievably bound up with larger theological and ideological commitments that the possibility of discovering the objective meaning of a passage is a priori ruled out of court. Terminological disarray between those two poles everywhere abounds. I recently received a letter from a student inquiring about certain professors and their suitability as doctoral supervisors: he wanted to know if they were 'open to students of a conservative hermeneutic'. If 'hermeneutic' is taken in a classical sense, the question is naive. If 'hermeneutic' is taken in a more modern sense, it is difficult to see how 'conservative hermeneutic' means anything very different from 'conservative theological stance' (which of course influences further interpretive decisions). I think I know what the letter-writer meant; but I suspect that what he said reflects the growing terminological and conceptual confusion surrounding 'hermeneutics'.

6. Just as there is a danger that exegetes will go about their task with too little awareness of hermeneutical questions, so there is a danger that the experts in hermeneutics will surpass themselves in sharpening and examining their tools, yet never use them. The proper goal of the study of hermeneutics is the better understanding of and obedience to Holy Scripture.

7. Yet the most touted hermeneutical approaches today never enable anyone to hear a sure word from God: indeed, they positively preclude such an eventuality. They are too closely allied with unacceptable ideological commitments in which the only absolute is language itself. Despite the many things we must learn from these hermeneutical developments, we must not worship at their shrine.

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# The Hermeneutical Crisis in Muslim Evangelization

Samuel P. Schlorff

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One of the phenomena of our day is that, alongside a spirit of renewal and change which is sweeping through the Muslim world, there is a parallel resurgence of interest in the Church in getting involved in the task of evangelizing the Muslim world. Without exaggerating or dramatizing the situation, it can be said that today there exists a unique potential for significant advance in Muslim evangelization. At the same time, however, the mission to Islam is faced with a hermeneutical crisis which risks hampering its advance. A part of the problem lies in the fact that the hermeneutical issues have been clouded by other issues.

At the heart of the problem is the question of using the Qur'an as a "bridge" in Muslim evangelization. Actually this is nothing new. From the beginning of Christian-Muslim relationships, the Christian side has always made use of the Qur'an in one way or another. It figured prominently in the early Protestant anti-Islamic polemic. In our day, the leading Protestant advocate for the use of the Qur'an as a bridge is Bishop Kenneth Cragg, an Anglican churchman who has written extensively in Islamics. In Catholic circles it is French orientalist Louis Massignon (d. 1962), whose influence inspires Vatican-Muslim dialogue.<sup>1</sup> In the Arab world, the leading proponent of the method is a Lebanese Catholic cleric who has written a number of studies in Arabic under the name of Professor Al-Haddad.<sup>2</sup> Recently, the idea of using the Qur'an as a bridge has caught the imagination of a number of evangelicals who view it as presenting more or less a breakthrough in communicating the Gospel to Muslims. At the North American Consultation on Muslim Evangelization (NACOME), held in Colorado Springs in October 1978, one of the position papers, written by Cragg, advocated the use of the "Christian potential" of the Qur'an in Muslim evangelization.<sup>3</sup> The subject came up for discussion in only one session, when a controversial booklet entitled *Have You Ever Read the Seven Muslim-Christian Principles?*<sup>4</sup> was presented. In the discussion, a number of participants expressed sharp disagreement with this method, but unfortunately, no time was allocated for analysis and clarification of the theological issues.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent survey of Catholic thought, especially Massignon, see R. Caspar, *Cours de Theologie Musulmane*, Tome I (Rome: Institut Pontifical d'Etudes Arabes, 1978), pp.48–63.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of Al-Haddad's views, see A. J. Powell, "The Qur'anic View of Other Scriptures", *The Muslim World*, LIX (April 1969): 98–105 and the reviews of his books by Kenneth Nolin in *The Muslim World*, LX (April 1970): 170–177, 184–187.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth A. Cragg, "Islamic Theology: Limits and Bridges" in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, Don M. McCurry (ed.)—(Monrovia, Calif.: MARC, 1979), pp.196–207.

<sup>4</sup> *Have You Ever Read The Seven Muslim-Christian Principles?* (privately printed by the author, n.d.), 32pp.

## USING THE QUR'AN "AS A BRIDGE"

To begin, what precisely is meant by "using the Qur'an as a bridge"? Unfortunately, there has always been a certain ambiguity in descriptions of the method. As a matter of fact, the Qur'an has been used in several very different ways. Without being exhaustive let me mention a few. One of the more innocuous ways is to use Qur'anic vocabulary, literary forms and style to express Gospel content. Another is to use Qur'anic data as evidence for historical facts, e.g. that Muhammad himself never claimed that the texts of the Old or New Testaments were corrupted. However, the latter has often been used for more questionable purposes. The nineteenth-century polemicists, such as William St. Clair Tisdall, liked to quote the Qur'an and other Islamic sources in a radical historical criticism of the Qur'an and of Islamic history with the purpose of bringing Islam "crashing to the ground."

This article focuses on a third use which I shall call the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic. Earlier polemicists such as Pfander also used this method but later writers have developed and refined it. The "bridge" idea refers really to this method. Using the "Christian potential" of the Qur'an is, strictly speaking, a matter of giving the Qur'an a Christian interpretation. What is involved is appealing to certain Qur'anic data or expressions having a verbal affinity with certain biblical data as evidence for a Christian interpretation of that data, and of the Qur'an as a whole. For example, Qur'anic references to Christ as "Word of God" and "a Spirit from Him" (Sura 4:169) are often given as proof of a high Christology. The booklet circulated at NACOME, already referred to, quotes passages from the Old and New Testaments and from the Qur'an as proof of seven "principles" (similar to the "Four Spiritual Laws") which are claimed to be "common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam".<sup>5</sup> However, these principles really represent an evangelical interpretation of Scripture and find no support either in Judaism or in Islam.<sup>6</sup>

It is this method which is at the root of the hermeneutical crisis in Muslim evangelization. Part of the problem is that many sincerely do not recognize it to be a problem. Who has not read of converts from Islam, here or there, for whom the Qur'anic witness to Christ has played a rôle in their conversion? While their number may not be large, their very existence does give pause for reflection. And, of course, who has not found that quoting the Qur'an is a sure way to get the Muslim's interest? Moreover, does not good pedagogy dictate that one proceed from the known to the unknown? At NACOME, several missionaries in the Near East reported a positive response from Muslim university students to the "Seven Muslim-Christian Principles".

However, when it comes to evaluating the method, a few favourable results are not sufficient evidence. When one considers the results throughout history, it must be acknowledged that, to say the very least, its effectiveness is ambiguous and even dubious. In the current surge of interest, is it not remarkable that no one has bothered to raise the question whether or not there might be some connection between the method and the admitted "sterility" of the earlier anti-Islamic polemic? However, in the last analysis, its validity must be established on theological rather than on pragmatic grounds.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> The author makes the common mistake of considering the Old Testament as synonymous with Judaism. Such is not the case. As a religious system based on a legalistic hermeneutic of the Old Testament Judaism rejects the hermeneutic of the Seven Principles, along with Islam.

## DOUBTFUL EXEGESIS OF QUR'AN

For the sake of brevity, we shall leave aside questions relative to the exegetical basis claimed for this method by its advocates, and shall limit ourselves to the more basic theological issues. First of all, it is very doubtful that an historical-grammatical exegesis of the Qur'an will support a Christian hermeneutic. Its advocates have to admit that Muslim commentators and theologians interpret the "Christian" elements of the Qur'an quite differently than they do. One device often used by the Christian interpreters of the Qur'an, however, is to try to put a wedge between the Qur'an itself and the classical Islamic interpretation of the Qur'an. They appeal to the admitted theological development that took place after the time of Muhammad, arguing that the Qur'an is much closer to the Christian view of Christ and of the Bible than are its later interpreters. They suggest that there is evidence that the Qur'an really supports Nicene Christology and the divine authority of the Bible.

It is true, as we already indicated, that certain Qur'anic words or phrases have a tantalizing affinity with certain biblical data, and might seem to invite a Christian interpretation. However, this affinity is ambiguous at best; for every plus for the Christian interpretation there are one or two, or more, minuses. Can one fault Muslim theologians, then, for applying what we would call "the analogy of faith" and interpreting these passages in a manner consistent with Islamic principles?

In sum, the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic is sectarian; it is no different in principle than, for example, a Mormon hermeneutic of the Bible. The problem with such a method, is that, if valid, it must be applied to Qur'an and Bible alike. If it is valid, the Islamic hermeneutic of the Bible is also valid. In our day, Muslims are increasingly writing about the Bible and biblical subjects from an Islamic standpoint. A recent publication of the Muslim Students' Association, entitled *Jesus in the Qur'an*, applies an Islamic hermeneutic to the New Testament. The author develops the thesis that Nicene Christology is not found in the New Testament, and concludes: "There is ground for closer relations between Christians and Muslims because essentially Muslims believe the same things about Christ as did the earliest Christians. It is only the unfortunate encrustations of old pagan mythology that divide them."<sup>7</sup>

In his well-known book, *The Call of the Minaret*, Bishop Cragg makes the following observation concerning Muslims' claims to find a prophecy of Muhammad in the Paraclete passages of John's Gospel: "It is well to remember that the interpretation arises, in the end, not from exegesis but from presupposition."<sup>8</sup> True, but the objection applies equally to his own use of the "Christian potential" of the Qur'an.

Clearly, if a sectarian hermeneutical method is valid, then the Christian and Muslim interpretations of each other's books mutually cancel each other, and communication and knowledge are impossible. As Walter Kaiser has effectively shown in a recent article in *Christianity Today* on the new hermeneutic, if communication and knowledge are to be

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<sup>7</sup> Sulaiman Mufassir, *Jesus In The Qur'an* (Plainfield, ind.: MSA, 1972), p.15. For an introduction to well-informed Muslim interpretation of Scripture see *Christianity: Some Non-Christian Appraisals*, D. W. McKain (ed.)—(N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), pp.225–88, and I. R. Al-Faruqi, "A Comparison of the Islamic and Christian Approaches to Hebrew Scripture", *Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXXI (1963): 283–93.

<sup>8</sup> K. Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.285.

possible at all, we must insist that “the significance of the text is grounded in the text itself as judged by the author’s use of grammar”.<sup>9</sup> Kaiser recognizes that culture has a rôle in interpreting a text but demonstrates that its rôle must be discovered by an historical/cultural study preceding interpretation; culture can never, however, nullify the ordinary principles of interpretation based on grammar which “are as natural and universal as is speech itself”.<sup>10</sup>

Surely, if we who are evangelicals hold the principle that the Bible is its own interpreter and the final judge of the validity of every system of hermeneutics, so we must allow the Qur’an to be its own interpreter and the final judge of the validity of every system of Qur’anic interpretation. When we do this we find that its tantalizing “Christian potential” is only a mirage.

### **A CONFLICT OF AUTHORITY**

A second problem with the Christian Qur’anic hermeneutic is that it introduces an authority conflict into the Church. It tends to compromise the unique authority of the Scriptures by an implicit recognition of the divine authority of the Qur’an. This problem has sometimes troubled those who use it. Some of the earlier polemicists such as Tisdall and Walter A. Rice, acknowledged this problem but never resolved it; while cautioning against appearing to give authority to the Qur’an, they nevertheless appealed to the Qur’an without, however, seemingly noticing the inconsistency in their action.<sup>11</sup> Tisdall counselled missionaries to tell Muslims that the “truths” of Islam are very much more true than Muhammad suspected, but denied that this gave any real authority to the Qur’an; he claimed that he was only showing the Muslim that “from his own standpoint, many of his arguments against Christianity are untenable.”<sup>12</sup> Bishop Cragg does not admit the problem. He repeatedly seeks to assure us that the openness to Islamic meanings which he vigorously advocates and practices does not involve any thought of compromising biblical revelation.

It is acknowledged that interpreting a text does not necessarily involve commitment to its authority. One can understand its meaning without being committed to its authority, although commitment is doubtless necessary to accurately assess its full implications. However, the Christian hermeneutic of the Qur’an is a different matter, because, as we have indicated, it does not employ the normal rules of interpretation; at the very least, one can say that it accepts the authority of the Qur’an insofar as it has been interpreted in a manner consistent with “Christian” principles. In any case, some Muslims have understood Cragg’s approach to imply an acceptance of the inspiration of the Qur’an.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Meanings from God’s Message: Matters for Interpretation”, *Christianity Today*, XXIV (Oct. 5, 1979): 31/1320.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 32/1321.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Walter A. Rice, *Crusaders of the Twentieth Century* (London: The author, 1910), pp.113, 114ff.

<sup>12</sup> W. S. C. Tisdall, *A Manual of the Leading Muhammedan Objections to Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1904), p.19.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Mohamed Al-Nowaihi, “The Religion of Islam: A Presentation to Christians”, *International Review of Mission*, LXV (April, 1976): 221.

The Church of Christ has often been ambivalent as to how to relate to non-Christian sources. From the second century on, many of the Church's theologians adopted a position that more or less assumed that the Scriptures and the conclusions of pagan Greek philosophy were in essential agreement, that is, when the "errors" of philosophy had been "corrected" by Scripture. The Reformers tried to counteract the resulting compromise and influx of unbiblical teaching into the Church, by affirming the theological principle of *sola Scriptura*. Nevertheless, the Protestant churches have still not been totally protected from compromise because hermeneutical principles have been admitted which undercut the principle of *sola Scriptura*. The Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic is identical to this approach of the Church to philosophy: it assumes an essential agreement between the Qur'an and the Bible on many points. In so doing, it creates an authority conflict for Muslim inquirers and converts, and for the emerging Muslim convert churches.

The fact is that commitment to Christ inevitably involves commitment to the authority of the Bible. When a Muslim inquirer is confronted with the claims of Christ through the Scriptures, he is faced with a choice: he must either commit himself to the Bible and the biblical view of Christ and forsake the Qur'an, or commit himself to the Qur'an and the Qur'anic view of Christ and reject the Scriptures. Even when the Muslim is initially led to the Scriptures and to Christ through his own study of the Qur'anic witness to Christ, the choice is still clear-cut; he is unambiguously confronted with a supernatural Christ only in the Scriptures, so if he would follow this Christ, it *must* be through the Scriptures.

However, when *Christians* try to lead Muslims down the ambiguous path of the Qur'anic witness to Christ they only inject ambivalence into the picture. For, as we have already shown, the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic involves an implicit acceptance of the authority of the Qur'an; one may very well hold to the unique authority and inspiration of the Bible, but when using this method, on the *behavioural level* one accepts the authority of the Qur'an alongside that of the Bible. This creates an authority conflict in the new convert which is especially acute for the emerging Muslim convert church. We hold it to be axiomatic that if there is to be a strong national church, it has to be solidly grounded in the Scriptures. At NACOME, I raised this issue in a private conversation with the author of the "Seven Muslim-Christian Principles." He agreed that it is necessary to lead the Muslim convert to transfer his allegiance from the Qur'an to the Bible, but said that he deals with this *after* the Muslim has come to Christ. But, are we candid or honest with the Muslim if we do not let him know the implications of his decision *before* he makes his choice? Well-intentioned or not, such ambivalent behaviour creates an authority conflict in many a convert which he finds difficult, if not impossible, to resolve satisfactorily.

## THE HERMENEUTIC AND EVANGELICAL OBJECTIVES

Another relevant question which must be raised is whether or not the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic is appropriate for our objective as evangelicals. Evangelicals who favour using this method in evangelizing Muslims hold to the evangelical objective of planting the Church in Islamic lands. On the other hand, others who use this method have another objective in view, which is in essence to create a new universal world order, motivated by a new universal spirituality to which all religions and ideologies contribute.<sup>14</sup> The only way for this new synthesis to come into being is for the various religions to evolve closer to one another.

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Beyerhaus, lecture on Ecumenism at Aix-en-Provence, France, March 1978.

The principal tool which is used to realize this inner revolution within the religions is the new hermeneutic, of which the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic is an expression.

There are two important ecumenical structures behind this second orientation of the Church's missionary enterprise. One of these is the World Council of Churches. While many churches and theologians within the Council are undoubtedly evangelical in theology and objective, the Council's secretariats and leadership are thoroughly engaged in the new orientation. A key instrument for the creation of the new spirituality is the WCC Sub-Unit for Dialogue with Peoples of Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI). In the past fourteen years, the DFI has organized a series of Muslim-Christian dialogues to explore common ground with a view to creating the new spirituality, and the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic has had a significant rôle in these dialogues.<sup>15</sup> The strong but ambiguous condemnation of proselytism in the Chambesy Statement (1976) can only be understood as an expression of the Council's will to create this new synthetic spirituality.<sup>16</sup>

The other ecumenical structure engaged in the new orientation is the Vatican. Through its Secretariat for Non-Christians, created by Paul VI in 1964, the Vatican has also organized a series of Christian-Muslim dialogues similar to those of the WCC.<sup>17</sup> (Each organization usually sends observers to the high-level dialogues organized by the other.) The Catholic Church's approach to dialogue is illustrated by the Muslim-Christian Research Group which brings together Muslim and Catholic scholars in France, Algeria and Tunisia on an unofficial, non-representative basis. This group adopted a set of guidelines for dialogue, one of which was that "with regard to the historical facts which found our faith, and with regard to our Scriptures, we accept 'readings' other than our own".<sup>18</sup>

Considering the authority conflict that it engenders, the conclusion seems inevitable that the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic favours the creation of the new type of spirituality envisaged by the ecumenical movement, but is not favourable to the planting of the Church in Islamic lands. The first thrives on theological ambiguity, but the latter requires clear biblical authority. Hence, whether or not we will consider this method to be appropriate depends on our objective.

## CONCLUSION

Evangelical missiologists and communicators must face the question whether the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic is worth its high cost. No doubt, one cannot expect unanimity as to the answer to this question. Some may require further clarification, refinements or modifications and discussion before acceptance; others will reject our conclusions outright. In any case, evangelicals can no longer afford to ignore the theological issues inherent in this method. Certainly, the channels of discussion must be kept open. It is also clear that there

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<sup>15</sup> *Christians Meeting Muslims*: WCC Papers on Ten Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue (Geneva: WCC, 1977), 158pp.

<sup>16</sup> On proselytism see *Ibid.*, pp.139–140, and *IRM*, LXV (Oct. 1976): 452ff.

<sup>17</sup> For Vatican activities see especially *Islam Christiana* (published by the Pontifical Institute of Arab Studies at Rome) I (1975): 87–91, 103–13, II (1976): 135–185, III (1977): 197–228, IV (1978): 165–186.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, IV: 185; for English version see *Encounter* (also published by the PIAS)—Oct. 1979): 11.

needs to be more research and theological reflection to identify uses of the Qur'an which may not be afflicted with such problems and which may be compatible with the evangelical objective. Above all, those engaged in Muslim evangelization need to heed the call of Walter Kaiser to join evangelical theologians in what he calls a "hermeneutical reformation," if the whole enterprise of Muslim evangelization is to avoid getting bogged down in the morass of relativity.

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## Evangelical Theology in Africa: Byang Kato's Legacy

Paul Bowers

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For those interested in Christianity in Africa, and especially for those interested in evangelical Christianity in Africa, it would be hard to overemphasize the significance of Byang Kato's *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975).

Byang Kato was a young Nigerian theologian of unusual ability and vitality, with a profound concern for the continuing growth of biblical Christianity in Africa. In this study he has focused on what he takes to be major theological pitfalls threatening the very survival of such Christianity on the continent. His thesis is that a pernicious syncretistic universalism is being promoted, almost unnoticed, within African Christianity. He seeks to call the evidence for this development to the attention of African Christians and to show how far it departs from true biblical teaching.

It must be said at once that Kato is by no means opposed to a legitimate contextualization of the Christian message in Africa. To the contrary, he says that an indigenous theology is a necessity. To fail to recognize—as some have—that this is fundamental to Kato's theological perspective is to fail to understand the man. I well remember Dr. Kato igniting a large evangelical congress in Nigeria, at the conclusion of a notable address, with the ringing appeal: "Let African Christians be Christian *Africans*!" He wanted a Christianity that was, as he puts it, "truly African and truly biblical".

It is to the second element of that prescription, the biblical element, that Kato directs attention in *Pitfalls*. Kato begins by describing factors which are proving conducive to the emergence within African Christianity of a syncretistic universalism. He singles out the theological issue of the relation of African Christianity to Africa's traditional religions as that feature of the current trend which he wishes especially to explore. An overview of traditional religions is then furnished, made more vivid and concrete by a careful description of the religious beliefs and practices in which Kato himself was reared, namely those of his own tribe, the Jaba of Nigeria. (The chapter on Jaba religion is of independent value as an addition to the descriptive literature on African traditional religions.)

The central section of *Pitfalls* contains an examination of the writings of two prominent African theologians, John Mbiti of Kenya, and Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria, and of major pronouncements from the influential All Africa Conference of Churches. Kato seeks to expose those elements from these three sources which either explicitly or implicitly promote a positive syncretistic assessment of the worth of African traditional religions for Christian faith and practice in Africa today. At the same time Kato subjects such elements to a systematic critique from a biblical perspective.

Throughout his analysis Kato is careful to emphasize that it is entirely consonant with biblical teaching to recognize that African traditional belief possesses some authentic knowledge of God. But he is adamant that submission to the authority of Scripture is incompatible with such further prevalent notions as that in African traditional belief an authoritative revelation is available to the Christian, or that in traditional religious practice a legitimate worship is being offered to God, or that traditional religions are in some sense salvific. The traditional religions of Africa “highlight the cry of the human heart, but the solution lies elsewhere”.

Kato concludes with the proposition that African Christianity is today faced with a critical challenge very similar to that faced by the Church of the first centuries, namely how to maintain the uniqueness of the Gospel in a milieu suffused with religious relativism, where the pervasive sentiment is that all religious roads lead eventually to the same goal. Then in the Mediterranean world and now in Africa, Kato says, the appeal of a syncretistic universalism is pressed upon the Church, not only by external force and persecution, but as well, and more insidiously, by deliberate accommodation promoted by leading intellectual groups within the Church. In such circumstances Kato wishes to “sound an alarm” and to recall the Church in Africa to a vital biblical Christianity.

### A ‘MAIDEN EFFORT’

And what ought one to make of Kato’s analysis? When in the preface of *Pitfalls* the book is described as a “maiden effort,” we are offered, I believe, in that phrase a basic clue for assessing its true character and significance—and that in three respects. (1) *Pitfalls* is not Byang Kato’s magnum opus. Kato was not yet forty when he died in a tragic drowning accident at Mombasa, Kenya, only months after the publication of this book. This was his first major publication, a reworking of his doctoral dissertation. Those who knew him best felt that a maturing of reflection, a sharpening of perception, a broadening of awareness, a mellowing of style, were all still very much in progress. This initial contribution should be judged, therefore, as precisely that, with all the freshness, the angularity, the limitations, which one should expect in a young man’s first book. To be sure the analysis is not always accurate, the polemic not always just, the demonstration not always persuasive, the organization not always clear. This is only to be expected. Indeed at his death Kato was already in process of revision. *Pitfalls* is to be taken not as a final word but as a first word, a promise of what might have come had Kato been spared. As such, it is an outstanding achievement.

(2) But even more important for the proper assessment of Kato’s *Pitfalls* is the realization that it is a “maiden effort” in the theological activity of African evangelical Christianity. One may of course find earlier contributions from various African evangelicals, but as often as not these were addressed to the issues preoccupying western missionary forces within Africa. *Pitfalls* represents the first sustained effort by an African evangelical to engage in the theological issues being debated in Africa by African theologians.



Many think indeed that Kato's most significant contribution to evangelical Christianity in Africa was his effort to awaken it to the necessity of becoming involved in the theological debate within Africa. He repeatedly charged African evangelicalism with "theological anemia," and energetically exploited his position as General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar to try to shift the pattern. He travelled and wrote and spoke constantly in the interest of an accelerated development of evangelical theological education at all levels in Africa. He deliberately sought out and encouraged young aspiring evangelical African scholars in their studies and work. He dreamed up programmes to stimulate greater theological involvement among evangelicals. And he himself undertook, with the publication of *Pitfalls*, an opening step in direct evangelical theological engagement in Africa. *Pitfalls* thus represents a substantive personal contribution within Kato's larger initiative to rouse evangelical African Christianity toward greater theological responsibility and involvement. This summons and vision may well prove Kato's most abiding legacy to evangelical Christianity on the continent.

It is important to observe, however, that *Pitfalls* should not be taken as Kato's intended paradigm for the theological task awaiting African evangelicalism. While Kato urged upon African evangelicals the importance of developing a positive African Christian theology, his one published book goes very little beyond a negative critique of certain pitfalls menacing such a venture. Kato doubtless would have argued, with reason, that this was an essential preliminary step, a ground-clearing exercise in preparation for the positive task. But he certainly saw the task as much more than merely polemics. And that he would himself have attempted to follow on with a positive contribution entirely fits the direction of his intellectual interests and inclinations at the time of his death. For balanced assessment, *Pitfalls* must be viewed within this wider context of Kato's vision for a positive evangelical theological initiative in Africa.

(3) It should come as no surprise that *Pitfalls* was not received everywhere with enthusiasm. No thoroughgoing critique of this sort ever is. Some reaction was vicious. A prominent religious newspaper in eastern Africa ran a review which called *Pitfalls* "alarmist in what it says and colonial in the perspective in which it is written." It went on to suggest that Kato, through miseducation, permitted himself to become the tool "in the preservation and protection of neo-colonial interests," and concluded with the charge: "There is a theological pitfall in Africa from which we must climb out: the reactionary evangelical theology which has a capitalistic birthright." In modern Africa those are powerful charges indeed. One theologian reputedly threatened legal action over certain passages in the book. When a reviewer for a leading Christian journal in West Africa unexpectedly submitted a warm commendation of *Pitfalls*, it was felt necessary to find and print a second sharply critical review on the facing page.

### **'TRULY AFRICAN, TRULY BIBLICAL'**

When emotive reactions to *Pitfalls* have receded, valid criticism will certainly remain. But it would be a misfortune if mere criticism were all that remained. For, in addition to its role within African evangelicalism, Kato's book must be recognized as a highly significant "maiden effort" within the wider general theological debate in Africa.

If one peruses the literature of African Christian thinking over the past two decades, one will encounter the affirmation that African Christianity must be both authentically African and authentically biblical. To be sure not all would feel this way, or put it so precisely. But it is a definite and recurring theme. And yet almost without exception attention within the

general theological discussion in Africa has fixed upon the former element, on making Christianity authentically African. It is a worthy and necessary task, as Kato himself emphasized. But if African Christianity is not to lose its function as salt in the world, not to say its very soul, it must also direct unrelenting attention to its rootage in the biblical traditions. So African theologians have asserted. The terms therefore in which the fundamental questions of contemporary African Christian thinking are posed demand a continuously nurtured orientation not only upon the query "Is it African?" but also upon the query "Is it Christian?" Yet in actual practice the debate has not accorded equal time to these two nodal questions.

*Pitfalls* in fact represents the first sustained effort in Africa to raise and pursue the latter question, through a systematic critique of contemporary African Christian thinking from the standpoint of biblical teaching. Whatever else one might wish to say, it is in this regard a ground-breaking work. It would be a pity therefore if general Christian thinking in Africa merely fixed upon flaws in *Pitfalls*. For *Pitfalls* represents a new direction in the theological debate, and, whatever the flaws, stands as a pioneering attempt in a critically necessary task for all true African Christian thinking. *Pitfalls* remains Kato's spirited challenge to African Christianity to move from theological complacency to theological responsibility and alertness, in the quest for a Christianity that is "truly African and truly biblical".

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# Threats and Dangers in the Theological Task in Africa

Tite Tienou

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*This article is a chapter in Tite Tienou's forthcoming booklet, The Theological Task of the Church in Africa, to be published by Africa Christian Press early this year. The Rev. Tite Tienou is a pastor with Eglise de L'Alliance, a Christian and Missionary Alliance-related church in Upper Volta, and the Executive Secretary of the Theological Commission of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar. He is a graduate of Nyack College, New York, the Faculte Libre de Theologie Evangelique, Vaux-sur-Seine, France and is at present on study leave to complete his Ph.D. at Fuller Seminary. This perceptive and important base for understanding the issues in evangelical theology in Africa was first given as a series of lectures at the ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Nigeria. The booklet will be sold in evangelical bookshops throughout Africa and will be available in the UK from Africa Christian Press, 20 Bedford Road, South Woodford, London E18 2AQ, and in Australia from Emu Book*

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(Editor)

It would appear, as Dr. Kato repeatedly warned, that the major problem of Christianity in Africa is a theological one. A Church without a theology, or with a weak understanding of God and His Word, stands on quicksand. And yet African evangelicals, while they perceive the danger, seem so reluctant to engage in real theological work. Is it because some missionaries and mission boards have been too successful in inoculating their African converts with their virus of mistrust and fear of theology? Perhaps so. But there are other dangers and threats to an evangelical theological task. Let me cite only a few: mistrust of theology, sacerdotalism, an ahistorical faith and denominational individualism.

These are largely dangers from within evangelicalism. One could also point to threats from the outside such as syncretism, secularism, ecumenism, universalism and pluralism. But since evangelical leaders persistently warn against dangers from the outside such as these, I do not think it wise to spend time just now on them. This is not at all to minimise their importance! I do believe, however, that if we want to make progress in our evangelical theological task, we must have the courage honestly to examine our own internal problems and bring out appropriate solutions. Too long we have seen the straw in the other man's eye without taking out the beam in ours first!

### **MISTRUST OF THEOLOGY**

Some evangelicals claim to have no theology but the Word of God. Theologians, they say, complicate God! In those circles the 'spiritual' thing to do is to hold to the pure and simple Gospel—as if the Gospel was that simple! To be sure the Gospel is clear enough for a child to understand it; and our Lord did say that those things were hidden to the wise but revealed to the children. But, at the same time, the Gospel is 'so deep, so difficult and so complicated' that even Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, could not understand it. What can we make of this? To me, it indicates that salvation, spirituality and the Christian life do not depend on the use or non-use of our intellect. It is not a question of '*do* we use our brain?'; it is '*how* do we use our brain?' I do not wish to open the old debate of faith and reason, but let me say this: *submission* to the Lord is the key to right Christian living. *Submitted* to His Lord, Peter, the Galilean fisherman, became a powerful instrument for the proclamation of the Gospel! *Submitted* to His Lord, Paul, the well-trained rabbi, contributed much to Christian theology! The history of the Church is full of such examples.

I realise that my argument can hardly convince those evangelicals who have a visceral mistrust of theology. When we study the history of theology and the nature of theological work, we may wonder if, after all, they are not right! For the history of theology is not full of certitudes. Here are what Karl Barth thinks are threats to theology: solitude, doubt and temptation.<sup>1</sup> If, then, all theologians can do is doubt, fight and disagree, theology is not worth trusting! So the argument goes. The burden of proof, then, is on those engaged in theological work. The sure way to make people trust in theology is for theologians to show real submission to Christ and obedience to His Word. This is what evangelical theologians must do in Africa. In so doing, let them reflect on what Pascal wrote. This man, even though

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<sup>1</sup> Barth, Karl, *Evangelical Theology*, trans. Grover Foley (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1964), pp.96–128.

he claimed the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and not the God of philosophers and scholars, had this to say about the use of reason in religion:

Submission and the use of reason, this is what true Christianity consists of ... If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have nothing mysterious and supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous.<sup>2</sup>

I think that if this advice had been followed, theology would not be where it is today.

## SACERDOTALISM

Ideally and biblically, theology should not be reserved for an élite. Theology is the task of the whole Church. We, who are heirs of the RefOrmation, believe this, for we confess the universal priesthood of all believers. When theology lacks its ecclesiological dimensions, when the Church fails to act as a controlling force on theology, then we are all in trouble. The danger of ivory tower theology is greater in sacerdotalism; where a distinct class of people shapes Church life by the formulation of doctrine and the celebration of religion.

One of the Characteristics of African traditional religion is the celebration of life. Because of this, no African is truly a-religious. For how will he take part in the celebrations of life's events? The religious specialist consequently holds a very important place in African life. And sacerdotalism has, therefore, a strong appeal for the African. There are, of course, many other reasons why sacerdotalism appeals to man in general and to the African in particular: the mysterious, the show, minimal personal commitment, etc. But the celebration aspect, which gives one a sense of belonging and identity, is certainly what appeals most to Africans.

The consequence of this aspect of traditional religion is that much of Christianity in Africa is sacerdotal—evangelicalism included. In evangelical sacerdotalism, the pastor leads and whatever he says the people follow, often without criticism. Dr. R. T. France makes the same point when he writes:

The church as a whole ... has got to learn to think biblically for the African context. Evangelicals who make much of biblical authority are too often ruled in practice, in Africa as in the West, by theological and behavioural conventions which they would be hard put to it to defend biblically. We are used to following, not to thinking issues through for ourselves; so no wonder we do not make the running.<sup>3</sup>

Sacerdotalism conditions man to trust the specialist (priest, pastor, spiritual leader) first before he trusts God and His Word! African evangelicals cannot 'make the running' in theology because some people must take orders from their 'patriarchs' before they say anything. Clearly then, the problem of Christianity in Africa is not only a lack of sound theology, it is also and foremost a faulty foundational theology of the church. The success of the so-called independent churches, with their patriarchs and prophets, proves, if need be, that sacerdotalism is here to stay. A little *charisma* is all one needs in order to win adherents!

Since evangelicalism is not free from this faulty foundational theology, we must rid ourselves of it. We must, therefore, hold to the *sola Scriptura* in word and in deed. We must

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<sup>2</sup> Pascal, Blaise, *Les Pensees* (Librairie Generale Francaise, 1972), Nos. 268, 273, pp.132, 133. My own free translation.

<sup>3</sup> France, Dick, "Christianity on the March", *Third Way*, 3 November 1977, p.4.

also put into effect what the Reformers understood by the universal priesthood of believers. This does not mean, however, that we should do away with all clergy or that we reject the specialist's contribution. It means that, because the church is also involved in the theological task, we should welcome the observations and criticisms of any member of the church and of the church taken collectively. But for the church effectively to control theology, its members must be like those of Berea who examined the Scriptures every day to see if Paul's preaching was in accordance with God's Word or not ([Acts 17:11](#)). Evangelical Christians must love God's Word enough to know it, and when they know it they will defend and confirm it. If the Theological Commission, or theologians, become too distant from the churches, how can they theologise together? Let evangelical theologians always listen to the evangelical *vox populi*; let the evangelical *vox populi* always make itself heard; and let this interaction produce a theology to the glory of our God!

### AN AHISTORICAL FAITH

The third danger for evangelical theology in Africa is a lack of proper historical perspective: faith becomes ahistorical and this can lead to all kinds of distortions and misconceptions. If sacerdotalism enslaves man to man and to tradition, the lack of historical perspective imprisons man in superficial faith. Speaking of American evangelicals, Bernard Ramm deplores the fact that the majority is deficient in historical knowledge. He continues by saying:

They lack a sense of the course of theological history which is their heritage. They believe what they are taught here-and-now and have no awareness of the there-and-before. To hold evangelical faith without a minimal knowledge of its history is theologically unhealthy if not precarious ... A number of fundamentalists and evangelicals have deserted the camp because, lacking any real historical knowledge of their heritage, they did not see their heritage in its proper light, nor did they have an appropriate vantage point from which to assess the alternative view to which they capitulated. *An evangelical who holds an ahistorical faith has no real sense of the theological and spiritual continuity of his faith.*<sup>4</sup>

Even though we cannot expect the 'average' Christian (what a terrible adjective!) to be well-read in history, he must still have a minimal knowledge of it and, above all, a proper perspective. He must fully grasp the fact that, starting with God's self-disclosure in Scripture, the Christian faith has been, is, and will be, solidly grounded in history. He must not think that Christianity began when the Gospel was first brought to his people. He must be aware of the fact that there have been twenty centuries of Christian life and thought before our time. The distinctive Judeo-Christian contribution to God's dealing with men is that revelation is historical and that this historical revelation is the eternal counsel of God. Many religions do not depend so much on history. You can be a devout traditional religionist in Africa without any reference to history; participation in the vital force of experience with the sacred is what counts. Similarly you can be a good Muslim without paying much attention to history; the important thing is belief in Allah and his prophet and the keeping of Islamic religious observance. Not so with Christianity! Our God is the Lord of history and our faith is an historical one.

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<sup>4</sup> Ramm, Bernard L., *The Evangelical Heritage* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1973), pp.14–5. Italics in original.

If the Christian cannot ignore history without serious consequences for his faith, what about the theologian or the church leader? It is evident that a church leader or theologian who has an insufficient knowledge of history can be terribly provincial and rigid in his outlook. Consequently he cannot develop a theology which will be of great service to the wider Church. Unfortunately a great many evangelical leaders in Africa lack an understanding of theological history. The teaching of some of them seems to imply that there was a gap from the time the canon of Scripture was closed until their denomination 'was raised up by God'; or that what has gone before was but 'keeping the truth captive'! 'Where was the Protestant Church before the Reformation?' can be an embarrassing question to many a leader.

The alternative for evangelicals is to study the history of theology and Christian thought in order to avoid the mistakes of the past and thus sharpen our tools for theological work. We must also give due weight to the progressive nature of biblical revelation.

### **DENOMINATIONAL INDIVIDUALISM**

The fourth major danger is denominational individualism. I am thinking here more particularly of the denominations which pride themselves on being 'evangelical'. Evangelical unity in Africa is somewhat ambiguous. Is this what Dr. Kato felt when, after rejecting the positions of 'unity in the dark' and 'no unity needed', he recommended 'true unity in diversity' in these words:

Realizing that people have different tastes including those relative to the type of church worship and the form of church government, evangelicals do not see the need of abolishing church denominations. Unity in diversity is also strength. The local church or denomination should not have to fear domination from the outside. For African evangelicals, the most desirable alternative is membership in the Evangelical Fellowship of each country and also membership in the African Evangelical Association. Such fellowship seeks to unite Christians in each country in fellowship and service, and then also unites all Bible-believing Christians in Africa.<sup>5</sup>

He seems to be cautious not to define what he means by service. But we need to include in 'service' the area of theology because this is one of the greatest needs and because church life cannot be separated from theology. But theology is the most difficult area for cooperation; this is where most differences come from; this is where our interests are at stake; this is where our individualism is made manifest. We need to go beyond the general agreement to work together. We need to establish principles of co-operation which will give us unity while respecting the individual identities of people and churches.

But one factor continually hampers our attempts to work together: the policies of some mission societies. There is a striking similarity between the foreign aid policy of developed countries toward developing ones and the policies of some mission boards operating in Africa. Much of foreign aid is done with strings attached: The receiving country must, for instance, with the money it receives buy goods from the donating country only. This ensures that the interests of those who give are secured. The same happens in church-mission relationship. When missions support programmes, they make sure that their distinctives are

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<sup>5</sup> Kato, Byang H., *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), p.170.

kept. Some will not even participate in any endeavour where only *one* of their particulars is missing!

Of course, we have a good word for this; we call it stewardship! But stewardship is taken too far when it divides the body of Christ and prevents it from being effective. The theological task facing evangelicals in Africa is very complicated because by money-power missions and denominations seek to foster their own brands of theology. When will the time come when we can carry out our programmes without having to take orders from the outside? Mission boards must understand that if they want to contribute to the success of evangelicalism in Africa they must give without undue burden to African churches.

Here I must add a word concerning the moratorium. The frustration of what I briefly described as standard human and mission practice seems to be what led to the Lusaka call for a moratorium. This is what we read in the Report:

We must therefore choose a policy of moratorium, by refusing to receive funds and personnel; this being the best means of giving to the African Church the power to accomplish its mission in the African context; to guide our governments and peoples to find solutions to their economic and social dependence ... (This is) the only efficient means of realizing our identity and staying a respected member of the universal church.<sup>6</sup>

This frustration is shared by African evangelicals. While a moratorium will hardly solve the problem, we must all recognise the legitimacy of the churches' yearning for identity and self-respect. Nobody likes to be a perpetual child! Furthermore we need to explore the moratorium in conjunction with ecclesiology and the theology of missions.

But, perhaps the spirit of fundamentalism is too much with us. Perhaps we are too busy reacting instead of seeking better to prepare for the theological task facing us. This is how Erickson describes the spirit of fundamentalism:

Because fundamentalism found itself under attack, it developed a defensive mentality. A harsh and uncharitable spirit came to predominate ... Within its own ranks, internal suspicion and bickering over minor points of doctrine increased ... From a movement of genuine scholarship, positive statement, and a certain latitude of evangelical position, fundamentalism came to be increasingly a negative, defensive, and reactionary movement with a narrowing of its theological options and an evaporation of scholarship and literary productivity.<sup>7</sup>

The task before us is so monumental that we cannot, we just cannot, afford to keep on 'bickering over minor points of doctrine'. We also face opposition from those who are not evangelicals. This is what we read in the Lusaka Message to the *Churches of the AACC*:

Before we can realize in Africa what God expects of us, before we can become a society which lives fully and exclusively for others, we call on the Churches of Africa to allow Christ to free them from:

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<sup>6</sup> *La Lutte Continue*, Rapport Officiel de la Troisieme Assemblee de la CETA, Lusaka, Zambia, 12–24 Mai 1974 (Nairobi, Kenya: 1975), p.55. My own free translation.

<sup>7</sup> Erickson, Millard, *The New Evangelical Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1968), pp.28–9.

1. Theological conservatism in order that we may understand, interpret, apply and live the message of the Gospel in a new light ...<sup>8</sup>

Note that the first thing they want to be freed from is theological conservatism. They will do everything they can to keep evangelicals from making progress. This is no time for internal fights!

In spite of all this, there are many opportunities for evangelicals in Africa today. We must not be discouraged, for our situation is similar to Paul's when he was at Ephesus: Adversaries are numerous but there is a great open door ([1 Corinthians 16:8, 9](#)).

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## **Is Rome Changing?: An Evangelical Assessment of Recent Catholic Theology**

W. A. Dyrness

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When a young Augustinian monk moved out of the monastery and into our home a few years ago, the small Protestant denomination was quick to claim he was a convert. But the truth was more complex and less edifying. He had become confused in the Catholic Church; he no longer knew who or what to believe in, and he left in search of a haven of unargued certainties. He was a graphic illustration of the turmoil within the Catholic Church. If ever it were possible to think of the Catholic Church as an unchanging and monolithic institution, the events of the last fifteen years have certainly made such a view impossible. The purpose of this paper is to make some attempt at assessing these changes from an evangelical point of view. In order to get our bearings, let us try to put the present tensions in historical perspective.

That "Rome never changes" was not only the opinion of those outside the Church, but up until the end of the nineteenth century it was the proud boast of Rome herself. The Reformation had given the Church a fear of change and it was not until John Henry Newman that any serious attention was given to development. In 1845 Newman published his famous "Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine". He insisted that genuine development was not only inevitable as different people reflect on the truth, but that it was positively advantageous in order to make truth available for all peoples and times. He pointed out that the Bible itself was written on the principle of development. A primary element in his discussion was that favourite nineteenth century conception that history progresses organically. The evolution that occurs—it would seem—is not in the truth, but in our

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<sup>8</sup> *La Lutte Continue*, op. cit., p.14. My own free translation.



consciousness of the truth. This developing understanding, however, to Newman's mind only underlined the need for an infallible authority to discern the truth. "Some authority there must be if there is a revelation given, and other authority is there none but she. A revelation is not given if there be no authority to decide what it is that is given."<sup>1</sup>

While those representing Newman's point of view were heard from during the first Vatican council (1870), it was not really until Vatican II (1962–1965) that Newman's ideas came to full expression in the Church. For it was the latter council that Pope John XXIII called to bring the Church "up to the present day". Indeed on the first day of the council the Pope made a point of distinguishing between truth and its formulation. As Gregory Baum comments: "A conservative outlook on the magisterium and the conservative claim that church teaching never changes simply cannot explain what happened at Vatican II. After all, at that council, the Catholic Church, formally, solemnly, and after considerable conflict, changed her mind on a number of significant issues."<sup>2</sup>

But, evangelicals wonder, are these changes really substantial or only cosmetic? This question is debated just as much within the Church as without. Hans Küng, recently relieved of his post in the Catholic faculty at Tübingen, has argued for example that a constant and permanent renewal is a necessity for the Church by reason of the time-bound character of all human formulations. Since the Church is made up of human and fallible men and women, renewal is a constant obligation.<sup>3</sup> Avery Dulles represents a more moderate position when he insists that the new formulations of doctrine are simply bringing out the intention of previous truth. Those following this line of thinking try to show, for example, how Vatican II has simply clarified and expounded the truth that can be found in the documents of Vatican I or of Trent. Dulles avers: "The language of the council allows one to think that what tradition adds is clarity and certitude rather than substantially new knowledge."<sup>4</sup>

In order to assess for ourselves the nature of these changes let us examine four areas of Catholic thought and practice and take soundings of recent discussions of interest to evangelicals.

## **IS THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH THE ONE, INFALLIBLE CHURCH?**

The idea of the unity and purity of the Church has an ancient and venerable history. In the third century Cyprian argued against the Donatists that the single source of the Church speaks of its essential unity. "Whoso stands aloof from the Church and is joined to an

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<sup>1</sup> *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922-1978 ed.), pp.88–9.

<sup>2</sup> "Liberalism lives in theologians," *St. Louis Review*, 23 Oct. 1970, p.3 quoted in David F. Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p.117. Wells notes how the changes have been reflected in theology manuals written before and after Vatican II. As we will see, Baum's assessment may well be too radical but the differing responses to Vatican II point up the inherent ambiguity in the idea of development. As J. B. Mozley pointed out in reviewing Newman's *Essay* in 1847, growth can also mean corruption or excess. See Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp.17–25.

<sup>3</sup> *The Council Reform and Reunion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1965), *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (Washington: Corpus, 1968), p.57.

adulteress is cut off from the promises given to the Church; and he that leaves the Church of Christ attains not to Christ's rewards. He is an alien, an outcast, an enemy. He cannot have God for his father who has not the Church for his mother. If any one was able to escape outside of Noah's ark, then he also escapes who is outside the doors of the Church (*De Catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, 6).” This emphasis was repeated at the Council of Florence (1438–58) and at Trent (1545–1560). In 1870 the First Vatican Council insisted in a tone that left little room for dialogue: “The Church is so completely bounded and determined in her constitution that no society separated from the unity of belief or from communion with this body can in any way be called a part or member of the Church ... she is wholly self-contained in unity. (She) is a permanent and indefectible society.”<sup>5</sup>

The Second Vatican Council, held in the presence of significant ecumenical observers, conveyed a different spirit. In his first encyclical (*Ecclesiam suam*) in 1964 Paul VI spoke of the necessity of dialogue. In the dogmatic constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) stress was placed on the Church as the “People of God” evangelizing, worshipping and reconciling before there was even mention of the clergy. The Church is pictured as living through humility and self-denial:

The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honoured with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honour Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and of action, and who show a true religious zeal. They lovingly believe in God the almighty and in Christ ... we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly there is an openness and honesty here that suggests a new flexibility. Avery Dulles has developed this new spirit by speaking of alternative models of the Church.<sup>7</sup> We may think of it, he proposes, as a mystical communion (lovingly united with God and each other), as a sacrament (a visible sign of the grace of Christ), as a herald (moving men to faith in Christ), as a servant (impregnating society with values characteristic of the kingdom of God) and as an institution (having a particular structure).

This new openness toward those outside and humility about the Church's mission opens up interesting potential for discussion and mutual enlightenment. But some discussions by Catholic theologians still imply ecclesiastical limits to this new attitude. Granted the Roman Catholic Church stands open to other Christians, is it ready to extend the same recognition to other churches?

As the Pope stands as the symbol and embodiment of the Church's unity and infallibility, a few comments may be offered on current conversation on the papacy. The authority of the Pope is traditionally thought to be expressive of the unity of the Church. Recently, however, progressives have abandoned the hierarchical model and attempted to understand his authority in an ascending way. This line of thinking insists that a monarchical ecclesiology dominated ideas of the papacy up until the last century and thus the question of authority was handled in a one-sided manner in Vatican I. In June of 1870 the Council declared: “The

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Rahner (ed.), *The Teaching of the Catholic Church contained in her documents* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1967), paras. 363, 366.

<sup>6</sup> Walter M. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), pp.33–4.

<sup>7</sup> *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974).

Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra, that is, when discharging the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, and defines with his supreme apostolic authority a doctrine concerning faith and morals that is to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in St. Peter, exercises the infallibility which the divine Redeemer wished to endow his Church for defining doctrine concerning faith and morals” (Denzinger, 3074). This definition has been the subject of much discussion (and misunderstanding) and in any case has only been invoked once (The Assumption of Mary in 1950). The view of the papacy that emerges from Vatican II ties the Pope’s authority more closely to his role as Shepherd of the Church and as representative of the authority residing in the Bishops as a whole—whether in synod or speaking individually in agreement with the truth. The Pope intervened only twice during the council and then only to direct and clarify discussion. The theological commission gave its views on papal authority in an explanatory note to the constitution on the Church: “The Roman Pontiff proceeds according to his own discretion and in view of the welfare of the Church in structuring, promoting, and endorsing any exercise of collegiality.”<sup>8</sup>

But the most serious attack on the idea of infallibility and thus of the uniqueness of papal authority came in Hans Küng’s bombshell of 1971.<sup>9</sup> There he claimed that the very idea of infallibility is contradicted by historical errors and in fact has no basis in Scripture. Moreover, it does not take into account human conditionedness; the New Testament guarantees the indefectibility of the Church, not the infallibility of its statements. To Küng’s mind Vatican II only made things worse by apparently extending infallibility to the whole hierarchy. Debate on the issue continues to rage, though most mainline Catholic theologians—including Küng’s teacher and friend Karl Rahner—have repudiated Küng’s position. Most would probably argue that Küng demolished a common misunderstanding of Vatican I, but was not able to advance the critical understanding of infallibility, one that is compatible with current models of the Church.<sup>10</sup>

While the present Pope, John Paul II, has recently forbidden Küng from teaching in a Catholic faculty, one should not be too quick to assess his attitudes toward the role of the Pope. Interestingly, his biographers have noted the warm praise that Karol Wojtyla lavished on the new theologians—including Küng—in the 1960s and early 1970s. In a revealing address delivered in October 1975, the then Archbishop of Krakow spoke on the role of the Bishops. He began by noting that the most powerful motive for apostolic power is service that reflects Christ’s own sacrificial self-giving. As if to take the teaching of Vatican II on collegiality a step further, the Archbishop went on to note that Bishops carry out their triple office—that of prophet, priest and king—in relation to the sharing of these offices by the people themselves.<sup>11</sup> The Bishops’ specific mission, roles and charisms are all geared to arouse, form and deepen the faith of the people (267). Of all the functions of the Bishops, however, priority must be given to the proclamation of the Gospel, with the mystery of Christ at its core. The magisterium as teaching must serve this end (in which the Bishops are

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<sup>8</sup> Abbott (ed.), p.100.

<sup>9</sup> *ET: Infallible? An Inquiry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> See J. T. Ford, “Infallibility: A Review of recent studies,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), pp.273–305.

<sup>11</sup> Karol Wojtyla, “Bishops as Servants of Faith,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 43 (1976), pp.265 and others in the text.

helped by the “privilege of infallibility”). For, he concludes, it is only the Gospel that can give human life its full meaning and assure it of salvation. After all, the real human values are immanent in the Gospel (272,3). This placing of the Bishop’s (and by extension the Pope’s) authority in the context of his role as servant of God’s people and proclaimer of the Gospel strikes an evangelical note that may yet bear fruit in the pontificate of John Paul II.

Evangelicals concerned as they are with infallibility of Scripture must not be too quick to judge these debates, for the Catholic claim is made on the basis of Christ’s promise to the disciples in [John 14](#) and [15](#) that the Holy Spirit would come to lead them into all truth. Clearly both evangelicals and Catholics are here arrayed against a common enemy: powerful cultural forces which question all divine norms.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, this promise and the finished work of Christ on which it is based is never a guarantee to our structures, it is rather a challenge to those who gather in his name and seek to make themselves subject to his word.<sup>13</sup>

### SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION: TWO SOURCES OF REVELATION?

The Council of Trent gave classical expression to the idea of two sources of revelation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ comes to us “in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us.”<sup>14</sup> Recent historical study has tried to show that Trent’s formulation was really a tacit witness to the importance of Scripture which previously had often been subordinated to tradition. Be this as it may, the statement has given rise to the common understanding that there are two parallel sources of revelation.

This dual source theory has been challenged in our own century by the growing understanding that dogma does not evolve by deduction from revealed propositions. The teaching office therefore is understood less as a process of continuing extrapolation from previous truth, than as a clarifying and elaborating of the written word. The debates and decisions of Vatican II lend support to this view. In November 1962 a schema was presented that put Scripture and tradition on an equal footing, but it was refused by a majority of the Bishops and so John XXIII withdrew it and asked for another. The Constitution on Divine Revelation (1965) that was finally approved gives quite a different impression. Through tradition:

The full canon of the sacred books becomes known to the Church and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit through whom the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church, and through

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<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note the parallels between French ultramontane writer Joseph de Maistre in *Du Pape* (1817) and Dutch reformed historian G. Groen van Prinsterer in *Ongeloof en Revolutie* (1847, ET *Unbelief and Revolution* in preparation 1973ff). Both spoke against the secular anti-authoritarian spirit issuing from the French revolution, one in the name of the Pope, the other in the name of the word of God.

<sup>13</sup> See the fine discussion of this in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp.206ff.

<sup>14</sup> Rahner (ed.), par. 59.

her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them.<sup>15</sup>

Such an understanding of tradition will appear far less dangerous to evangelicals who are becoming increasingly aware of their own traditions, and the influence of these traditions on the interpretation of Scripture. Avery Dulles recalls Newman when he speaks of the mediating function of tradition. "The Church throughout the centuries has the task of meditating constantly in order to plumb the depths of the revelation already given."<sup>16</sup> The Church brings out the truth of Scripture, he says, as the seed gives the bloom, in which the vital principle is the Holy Spirit. "The Church may be said to have a charismatic sensitivity for what God intends to communicate by the book."<sup>17</sup> Very recently in summarizing the views of Catholics and Protestants on Scripture, Dulles has gone so far as to say of the Catholic position: "There is rather general agreement that the Bible rather than tradition is the fundamental embodiment of the word of God ... as the councils point out, the teaching of the magisterium is not itself the word of God; rather it is under the word of God which it serves."<sup>18</sup>

One of the most important practical fruits of this attitude since Vatican II has been the increased emphasis on biblical studies (or as it is called in Catholic circles "Scripture studies"). Bibles and New Testaments in modern language translations are increasingly being made available to the people. For all of this we may be thankful. But of the theological questions that remain we may mention two.

What are we to do when in fact Scripture and tradition are in conflict? We may be allowed to wonder if in fact Scripture has the last word when the Church continues to teach things foreign to Scripture. We may accept the fact that our reading of Scripture is influenced by the Church's place in history, but this does not remove the limits to what she finds there. There has been much effort given recently to showing that the doctrine of penance or the teaching about Mary, to name only two issues, are really only blooms from biblical seeds. But when, we might ask, does extrapolation become further revelation? As Berkouwer warns, these tensions serve at the least to threaten a genuine "listening to the apostolic witness in communion with the Lord of the tradition".<sup>19</sup>

Then we might inquire how the authoritative interpretation of tradition relates to modern scientific study of the Bible. After an initial hesitancy during which the Biblical Commission in Rome sought to restrain Catholic exegetes from Protestant excesses, Pius XII in 1943 defended the unhindered scientific study of the Bible. Vatican II reaffirmed the freedom of theological work in these terms: "This sacred Synod encourages the sons of the Church who are biblical scholars to continue energetically with the work they have so well begun, with a constant renewal of vigour and with loyalty to the mind of the Church."<sup>20</sup> Today Catholic scholars share fully in modern critical debates about Scripture. One is used to

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<sup>15</sup> Abbott (ed.), pp.116–17.

<sup>16</sup> *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, p.76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>18</sup> "Scripture: Recent Protestant and Catholic Views," *Theology Today* 37 (1980), pp.25–6.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.107.

<sup>20</sup> Abbott (ed.), p.126.

hearing, for example, that Jesuit Raymond Brown agrees with Protestant Ernst Kasemann that the Bible contains many and sometimes conflicting traditions. From an evangelical point of view it may be that at this point the Church is changing too rapidly! How does the freedom of these scholars relate to the teaching office of the Church? One becomes suspicious of the manoeuvres of some scholars as they forage around within dogmatic statements to justify their theological and biblical discussions. At the same time, faced with the bewildering diversity of interpretation in certain areas, Protestants themselves often feel the need for authoritative conclusions. Must we suppose the Holy Spirit only functions in the Church today by the unstable consensus of biblical scholars? Such questions suggest that Protestants need to take another look at the way traditions function in the Church and listen carefully to the newer discussions on the magisterium.

### **THE SACRAMENTS: DO THEY MEDIATE DIVINE GRACE?**

One of the areas seeing the most far-reaching changes, and where Protestant conceptions are most often outmoded, is in the teaching about sacraments. Catholic discussions of the sacraments now are apt to admit that a mediaeval hangover has plagued the Church's teaching, a hangover that was made normative at Trent. Meanwhile other valid traditions from the Church's history were overlooked. The newer emphasis on the Church as the people of God has led to new perspectives on the roles of priest and people. No longer is the congregation seen as a passive recipient of the grace administered by the priest, but now they are viewed as full participants in the symbolic activity that we call sacraments.

An example of these trends is to be found in a recent article by distinguished Belgian theologian Piet Fransen.<sup>21</sup> Sacraments, he claims, should be viewed as symbolic activity rather than objects or signs. Therefore a better model for understanding this activity is "celebration". Celebration implies a public performance—not mere merry-making—as in the Old Testament cult, where the enactment of praise and adoration was called a "service" with an important dimension of joy (and sorrow). Fransen argues that the tridentine formula of the sacrament as an efficacious cause which produces divine grace was fixed somewhat in reaction to Protestant views, which expressed other valid streams of the Church's traditions. As a result, Fransen admits, "we have more or less lost the deep sense of the evangelical and biblical message of God's gratuitous forgiveness as a sovereign act of God's mercy and love" (162).

Today we understand more about the nature of people as they worship in their social and emotional dimensions, their need for festivity, beauty, joy, freedom, and fullness. Now we are able to see the sacrament's efficacy differently: "In and through the very fact that we restively acknowledge in faith and hope God's ineffable inner Presence, we actualize and realize it at the same time under the graceful attraction of God's inner present" (167). What then is the nature of the grace that is communicated? We must not think of it as a substance, Fransen insists—and here he echoes some of the words of Karol Wojtyla we quoted earlier—rather it is a new world of meaning, a God-given aspect of reality in which we can find ourselves. "In the sacrament God is reaching toward us through Christ and his Spirit" (170).

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<sup>21</sup> "Sacraments as Celebration," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 43 (1976), pp.151ff and others in the text. This article was recommended to me by liturgist James Meehan, S.J., of Loyola School of Theology in Manila as representative of the best recent Catholic views on the sacrament.

While there is much to appreciate about this new approach, we might still wonder about the nature and object of the faith the congregation is expected to express. Is faith the hearty trust in the finished work of Christ, or is it more of a preconceptual intuition? In many discussions something remains of the implicit faith—a simple confidence in the Church and what she teaches—that Calvin spoke so strongly against. In the constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) faith when it is living is characterized as having the need “to prove its fruitfulness by penetrating the believer’s entire life, including its worldly dimensions, and by activating him toward justice and love.”<sup>22</sup> Avery Dulles defines faith as “wholehearted acceptance of something that comes upon one with the strength of revelation—something that proves capable of giving meaning and purpose to a man’s total existence.”<sup>23</sup> This entrusting to God is registered by taking the sacrament. Of this surrender to the overwhelming reality made present by God’s grace, Canon Mouroux says: “The saving movement of the soul, initiated by grace, can pass through formulae themselves pitifully inadequate or even glaringly false.”<sup>24</sup> Here the act threatens to take precedence over the object. Faith, as the Reformers pointed out, is assent as well as trust, both residing in the finished work of Christ’s death and resurrection. Interestingly, Karol Wojtyla strikes a stronger note when he defines faith as “the response of the whole person to the word of God—a response given to God in the community of the Church.” He shows his deep understanding of the nature of the person when he goes on to explain this: “We find here, clearly defined, the traits of an interpersonal relationship. In them, grace and freedom define the dynamics of the encounter and characterize its depth.”<sup>25</sup> Clearly, we should not be too anxious to fix Catholic thinking in old and inadequate patterns.

## THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

One of the most vital signs of life in the Catholic Church today is the so-called charismatic renewal and the associated basic Christian community movement. Here all the problems and potentials of the Church are brought to sharp focus and stimulate the keenest interest on the part of evangelicals. The charismatic movement spread from the Protestant churches to the Catholic Church in the 1960s beginning at Duquesne and Notre Dame universities in the United States. Soon it was established at Ann Arbor, Michigan with the founding of the Word of Life community. Within five years this community and others like it have spread around the world. By 1976 there were an estimated 3,000 groups in the United States and more than 1,600 worldwide. In Manila, Philippines the large Friday evening prayer meeting reached 1,000 before it was divided into two sometime ago; smaller groups have sprung up around the city.<sup>26</sup>

While forming a part of the larger renewal movement in the Catholic Church which took its impetus from Vatican II, the renewal is more concerned with the renewal of spiritual life

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<sup>22</sup> Abbott (ed.), p.219. The constitution on revelation notes that faith “entrusts the whole self freely to God”. *Ibid.*, pp.113–14.

<sup>23</sup> *Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1973), p.15.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Mouroux, *I Believe* (London: Chapman, 1959), pp.73–4.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.264.

<sup>26</sup> See esp. Leon Joseph Cardinal Suehens, *A New Pentecost?* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

than of the structures of the Church. It is characterized by the appearance of charismatic gifts, tongues, healing and prophecy, and a good deal of the literature of the movement discusses the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>27</sup> Importance is given to the baptism of the Holy Spirit which is described as the powerful presence and action of the Holy Spirit. The overriding concern of the movement, however, features a lively awareness of the reality and presence of God and personal union with Christ which manifests itself in a deep hunger for Scripture and often a renewed interest in the sacraments. Practically this emphasis issues in small informal prayer meetings where there is sharing, reading of Scripture and often hilarious singing.

In general, the hierarchy has responded in a positive, if sometimes cautious, manner. Indeed up until his recent retirement, Belgian Cardinal Seunens, as well as being one of the most influential reformminded Cardinals in recent conclaves, has been the unofficial sponsor of the movement. Statements by various Bishops' conferences note that in general the movement does not feature any theological innovation, but that pastorally it has sometimes become troublesome. In any case it is recognized as a most important locale for grassroots ecumenism.

Evangelicals can hardly be indifferent to a movement with such obvious signs of God's presence. But many of the tensions we have observed above are also present in the renewal movement. David Wells notes the parallel between this personal renewal and the theological renewal. Both seek to replace an external authority with an internal and subjective one.<sup>28</sup> While the parallel is not strictly accurate—indeed in some parts of the world (e.g. Latin America) the charismatic movement explicitly rejects theological innovation as not making any contribution to the renewal of spiritual life—the question does arise in both cases: where is the final locus of authority? Is Scripture allowed to play a normative role, or does it merely accompany the experience of the Spirit?

Here the problem of the nature of faith again becomes evident: Upon what does the faith experience actually rest? Evangelicals involved in the movement are quick to insist that the work of Christ often becomes central for participants of the movement. But one may be allowed to wonder why a similar experience of faith engenders such widely different attitudes toward dogma and ritual, and such indifference to theological distinctives. Some become more devoted to the Virgin; others lose interest in traditional ritual. Donald Gelpi pleads that the gifts serve to heighten faith consciousness: "Personal consciousness and community consciousness are transmuted into faith-consciousness when consciousness heightening activity is undertaken at either a personal or communal level in response to an impulse of divine grace. The gifts of the Spirit mediate such activity within the Christian community."<sup>29</sup> Doubtless such experiences can and do mediate God's presence, but they also carry the danger implicit in Catholic theology: that the proclaimed word of the gospel, the unique authoritative element in the Church, is replaced by a sacramentally mediated presence of God in our faith consciousness.

The problems and opportunities of the fiestas and pilgrimages of popular Catholicism may be mentioned in this connection. In many places of Latin America and Africa there are vigorous movements of folk-catholicism. The Bishops' Synod on Evangelization in 1974

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<sup>27</sup> Such as Steve Clark, *Baptized in the Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Ann Arbor: Word of Life, 1976) and Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1974).

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp.39–50.

<sup>29</sup> *Charism and Sacrament* (New York: Paulist, 1976), p.103.



especially praised these practices as quasi-natural aspirations which reveal a genuine presence of God, and which evangelism need only develop and bring to maturity. As Archbishop Eduardo Pironio reported to the Synod on October 1, 1974: In this popular religiosity “we find valid and solid elements of an authentic faith which demand to be purified, interiorized, made more mature, and brought to bear on daily life.”<sup>30</sup> As in the charismatic renewal we see here a laudable desire to bring the Christian faith into the every day life of the people. But unlike the renewal where people open themselves to a fresh work of the Spirit, here we are told to build on the natural aspirations of the people. Once again the object and nature of this faith is considered secondary, and therefore the centrality of the preaching of the Gospel and the necessity of repentance and faith in Christ is called into question.

### **WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?**

A review of Catholic theology at the very least stimulates the evangelical to reflect on his or her own situation. For what is clear above all is that the problems facing the Catholic Church are not primarily “Catholic” problems, but tensions all Christians are called upon to wrestle with today. No one has summarized these tensions more succinctly than Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan. He notes that in the last hundred years the older classical idea of culture has been replaced with an empirical perspective. In the former, culture is normative and theology permanent. In the latter, culture develops and theology becomes a process wherein method is important.<sup>31</sup> From this has grown the question of the historical and cultural nature of human statements and understanding. Allied with this are the problems of secularism and materialism spreading from the West and accompanying modernization around the world. Finally we have been forced to deal with the issues of authority and understanding in the context of the advance of critical methods of biblical study. This has all put a variety of issues on the agenda of Pope John Paul II, and the responses he makes may be instructive to other churches faced with similar problems.

At the same time it can no longer be ignored that Vatican II has introduced a substantial change of direction into the Catholic Church. The question uppermost in the minds of observers of recent papal conclaves was whether the changes of Vatican II were to be encouraged or repudiated. Despite the appearance of conservatism in some areas there can be little doubt that John Paul is committed to furthering the reforms of the Council. He has repeatedly stated his aim to “make explicit what, during the Council, was still only implied”.<sup>32</sup> This changed spirit, put together with the complex problems we noted above, has brought the Catholic Church into a period of transition and development which cannot yet be charted. What ought to be the evangelical response to the present situation?

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<sup>30</sup> Mimeographed notes circulated at Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University in Manila.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), p.xi.

<sup>32</sup> See John Jay Hughes, “What’s Happening to the Church?” (Review of Gerard Noel, *The Anatomy of the Catholic Church*). *The New Review of Books and Religion*, March 1980, p.7.

First, it must be our primary responsibility to inform ourselves about the actual situation in the Church today. Older manuals of Catholic teaching<sup>33</sup> portraying the Church as it was before Vatican II should only be consulted for historical purposes, they can no longer be considered authoritative. Whatever may be happening, evangelicals must not be found in the anomalous position of insisting the Catholic Church holds unbiblical and traditional positions that are currently being repudiated. True there are Catholics who cling to older practices, there are many areas of the world where change has been almost unnoticed, but these instances are no more representative of the Church today than narrow fundamentalists are representative of the evangelical movement. Indeed recent consultations between evangelical and Catholic representatives indicate that Rome recognizes a genuine affinity with evangelical faith and practice. In any case it would be foolish to ignore such openness.

Evangelicals then find themselves in the position of wishing to encourage certain trends in the Church while remaining cautious about others. In all events they have much to learn from Catholic discussions today. The documents of Vatican II, for example, in addition to making such edifying reading, may enable us to point out things to our Catholic friends of which they may well be ignorant and which might encourage them toward genuine faith in Christ. Meanwhile we should be eager to press into their hands evangelical materials that will satisfy their newfound curiosity about biblical teaching. It becomes clear from fellowship with those interested in reform and renewal that we have to do here with Catholic evangelicals, and we must certainly allow for this category in our thinking and discussion. It remains true, however, that just as the Catholic Church today is no longer a monolithic institution, so we cannot insist on a single approach or attitude toward all who are in the Church. We do not betray the Reformation when we admit we have much to learn from a deeper and more serious dialogue with brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church.

Not least we have much to learn from the Catholic struggle to become a truly worldwide community, in which believers of every nation take their places of leadership in the body of Christ. In fact it is Karl Rahner's view that the fundamental theological interpretation of Vatican II lies in the fact that there a western church became a world church, and there the monumental task of facing up to the theological, hermeneutical and missiological implications of that fact have begun.<sup>34</sup> Evangelicals may ignore this shift in focus if they wish, and, in spite of the continued growth of the missionary movement, recent consultations indicate they may well be doing so—but they do so to their own peril. For as Gerard Noel says of the growing Third World church “by the turn of the century, (it) will have swept so far ahead as to leave the old church of the European-North American axis isolated and probably in decay.”<sup>35</sup>

None of this is meant to suggest that no theological problems remain. We have touched on some of these in this paper and there are certainly others. We need have no hesitation to insist that Scripture be allowed to speak the final word, and that we all see our roles as

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<sup>33</sup> Loraine Boettner's book *Roman Catholicism*, still circulated by Banner of Truth Trust, unfortunately belongs in this category.

<sup>34</sup> See “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), pp.716–72.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted by John Jay Hughes, *op. cit.*, p.26.

servants of God's word. For we continue to believe that only in this way is Christ allowed to be the Lord of the Church and salvation seen as God's gracious offer to all people.

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## **Base Ecclesial Communities in the Brazilian Catholic Church: A Study of Re-Evangelization and Growth**

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Possibly the most exciting item of missiological news to come out of Latin America these days cannot be found in the journals of most Protestant mission organizations. It has to do with the *comunidades eclesiais de base*<sup>1</sup> or base ecclesial communities, the fastest-growing movement within the Roman Catholic Church. *Time* magazine (May 7, 1979, p.88) called it the most influential Catholic movement in Latin America, where there may be as many as 150,000 *comunidades*—80,000 of them in Brazil. A prominent sociologist, in a Smithsonian Institution symposium, states that these "grass-roots congregations" promise to change the face of Brazilian Catholicism into the nation's first truly working-class association. He goes on to liken this phenomenon to eighteenth-century Wesleyanism (IDOC 1978:78–84).

What is the nature of, this movement? What are its social and historical roots and its fundamental characteristics? And what is its significance for both Catholic and Protestant mission today? I have approached these issues with several concerns: (1) as a Christian who is deeply concerned about total human liberation; (2) as a Protestant who has been engaged in mission in Latin America for over a quarter century; (3) as an evangelical missiologist who is committed to holistic evangelization and church growth; and (4) as an inquisitive student of social and religious phenomena.

### **DEFINITION**

The base ecclesial communities constitute a dynamic movement that defies easy definition. The 1968 Medellín Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM II) called them "the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus ... the initial cell of the ecclesiastical structures and the focus of evangelization ... the most important source of human advancement and

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the Portuguese spelling throughout; Spanish: *comunidades eclesiales de base*.

development" (CELAM II:201). The 1979 Puebla Conference (CELAM III) called the *comunidades* "an expression of the Church's preferential love for the poor ... the focal point of evangelization, the motor of liberation."

CELAM III defined "community" as "intimate personal relationship in the faith". "Ecclesial" suggests the church-relatedness of these communities through the celebration of the Word and of the sacraments. But, above all, it is the church "putting into practice the Word of God" and making "present and active the church's mission". Finally, the *comunidades* are "of the base" because they are germinal cells in the wider parish community.<sup>2</sup>

What sets the Brazilian base ecclesial communities apart from other superficially similar movements are their origins. They have not been imported from abroad. Nor are they communities that have been created by ecclesiastical fiat as part of some predetermined strategy for church renewal and re-evangelization. They are grassroots communities, spontaneously in response to the Latin American reality, and of which the church was virtually forced to take cognizance.

The church gradually became aware of the existence of "natural communities (neighbourhood associations, youth clubs, workers' cells, etc.) ... local and environmental, which correspond to the reality of a homogenous group and whose size allows for personal fraternal contact amongst its members." Having discovered these "homogenous units," the church determined to orient its pastoral efforts "toward the transformation of these communities into 'a family of God.'" It tried to do this by making itself present among them "as leaven" by means of a small nucleus. The *comunidade* "creates a community of faith, hope and charity which takes seriously and at the same time challenges the 'homogenous units' which are at the base of society" (CELAM 11:201).

## SOCIO-HISTORICAL ROOTS

The transition from a traditional and semipagan institution that for almost 500 years had been allied with the rich and powerful to a Church that is beginning to return to the poor did not happen as the result of a sudden change of heart. The social and political and religious determinants from the time of the discovery of Brazil by the Portuguese until the mid-nineteenth century were the royal patronage system, which controlled the Church, and the *fazenda*, or system of large plantations with slaves and, after 1888, indentured labour.

Governmental changes from royal colony (1500) to independent empire (1822) and republic (1889) did not alter these facts. *Fazendeiro* and plantation chaplain, African slaves and mulatto and mestizo "free men" were all part of an overarching *patron*-dependent relationship to which the Church, with only a few exceptions, gave its blessing. This relationship did not change when feudalism was supplanted by industrialism, setting in motion the vast peasant migrations to the cities and the rise of the festering *favelas* (Freyre 1964:30f.,390f.; 1968:26,95; De Kadt 1970:10–50).

The ecclesiastical fact of life during the first 489 years of Brazilian history was "regalism"—the control of the Church by the crown: the direct result of the royal patronage granted the Iberian monarchs by the Pope. When Rome regained control of the Brazilian Church with the proclamation of the republic, it inherited a weakened and venal institution that had all but lost the allegiance of the masses. While the Church basked in the reflected

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations are from a rough translation of the final Puebla document done by some of the journalists who were present.

glory of the crown, it evidenced small awareness and concern over this fact. Forced to stand upon its own feet, the Church discovered the virtual nonexistence of its own bases (De Kadt 1970:53f.; Bruneau 1974:11–29). During this period several Protestant denominations began to appear on the Brazilian scene.

The indigenous population and the African peoples who were transferred wholesale into Brazilian slavery were superficially “Christianized”. They were allowed by their masters to practice their animistic rites in secret because this “facilitated the civilizing process and aided in the disciplining of the slaves” (Freyre 1964:328). Afro-Brazilian Spiritism—and recent Pentecostal growth—can be explained in part as a reaction of the masses against the social, economic, cultural, and religious exploitation by the feudal *fazenda* and ecclesiastical systems.

During the first half of this century the Church attempted to recoup its losses through an alliance of convenience with an anticlerical populist dictatorship. The political ferment and growing popular discontent during the presidencies that followed gradually forced the Church into contact with the exploited masses, and numerous radical Catholic movements came into being. Two of the most important for our study were Catholic Action (AC) and the Movimento de Educacao de Base (MEB).<sup>3</sup> The MEB was born from the Church’s increasing awareness of the plight of the peasants and out of its unease over Marxist successes. The basic techniques used by the MEB—Paulo Freire’s *conscientizacao* (consciousness raising) and nondirective group dynamics—have been refined in *comunidade de base* methodology (Bruneau 1974:30–104; De Kadt 1970:34–105; LADOC: Vol. 2, April 1972, and Vol. 6, Sept.–Oct. 1975).

The violent reaction of the landholder-industrialist-military alliance to the threat of a radicalized Catholicism culminated in the military *revolucao* of 1964, and in the eventual demise of the MEB as a prophetic movement. However, the prophetic voices and actions of the progressive priests and bishops who supported this movement led to an escalating confrontation between Church and State. Events have placed the Brazilian hierarchy in the forefront of the struggle for re-evangelization and human rights in Brazil and Latin America (Bruneau 1974:127–65; De Kadt 1970:177–211).

Official Catholic documents and pronouncements after Vatican Council II gave the Brazilian progressives in the hierarchy the doctrinal underpinning for their actions. Gradually, for the sake of institutional solidarity, an increasing number of bishops have been forced to define their position vis-à-vis the *revolucao*’s doctrine of national security. This doctrine subsumes, at whatever human cost, personal and collective civil rights to the security and economic well-being of the state (LADOC Keyhole Series, no. 8:1–5; *Pro Mundi Vita*: Dossier 1977; IDOC:14–29: 43–45).

The “Brazilian economic miracle” has, by the government’s own statistics (1978), resulted only in widening the gap between the rich and the poor. As they struggled to help the poor of Brazil to understand the meaning of the Catholic faith, the clergy were confronted with two aspects of the same reality: (a) socio-economic injustice and (b) Christo-pagan popular religiosity. This twin reality has shaped the Church’s approach to base community praxis.

## FUNDAMENTAL ORIENTATIONS

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<sup>3</sup> Dom Hélder Câmara and several of his “radical” and progressive colleagues were early militants in the ranks of the AC.

The significance of the *comunidades de base* for Christian missiology can be found in four orientations, which set the *comunidades* apart from both traditional Catholicism and other basic Christian communities in Latin America.

First, Reality with a capital *R* is the operative word in the Brazilian *comunidades*. The ingredients of this Reality are the context of poverty, injustice, and marginalization in which the majority of Brazilians find themselves. *Comunidade* members have begun to discover that this Reality is not a divine “given”. They are seeking to understand this Reality not so they can accommodate themselves to it, but in order to be able to change it as part of their Christian responsibility. Both Scripture and a critical socio-economic analysis—which draws from several sources, including the writings of Brazilian theologians Leonardo Boff and Carlos Mesters—serve as tools for the unmasking of this Reality.<sup>4</sup> Reality is also the nominality of the masses, which must be re-evangelized with the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Second, the *comunidades eclesiais de base* have arisen more or less spontaneously in response to Brazilian Reality. The interpretation of the ecclesial Reality of the *comunidades* will vary depending upon whether it is being seen from the vantage point of the hierarchy or from the perspective of the *comunidade* leaders. On the part of the latter, the Church is the people of God, composed of all those who have been baptized. It has been called to be a servant community. But the Church all too often has been unfaithful to this commission. According to Father José Marins, Latin American coordinator of the movement, the base ecclesial communities are a faithful pilgrim remnant—what Dom Hélder Câmara has called “Abrahamic minorities” (Câmara 1976:78)—within the larger nominal Church and in the structures and institutions of society. This *koinonia* admits of no anonymous Christianity (despite the movement’s theological indebtedness at some points to Karl Rahner).

Sin and salvation, while affecting the individual person, are understood in the *comunidades* more in corporate and structural terms. Conversion is a process. The community of faith is constantly “being converted” to God in Christ through the Church, to the Word and through the neighbour. These are the instruments that God uses to confront us with Reality.

The *comunidade* leaders see their movement as a reordering from the bottom up of the millennial structures of the Church. The Church is no longer seen as a pyramid with the Pope at the top, but as a circle in which every member, including the hierarchy and the humblest Christian, has a ministry which has been given to him or her by the Holy Spirit. In contrast, other Catholic observers tend to see the movement as one of several expressions of the one Church, including the traditional territorial Church, the charismatic renewal, the neocatechumenate, marriage encounter, and others.

Reality is also liturgical, because it is in the Eucharist that the christological and ecclesial centre of the Gospel becomes most evident to members of the *comunidades*. During the “celebration” every aspect of the austere liturgy focuses upon the significance of our Lord’s passion for the Reality which the *comunidade* members experience daily. It is a call to *marturia*, because more than fifty *comunidade* leaders have already been murdered or have disappeared in Latin America. Others have been harassed, imprisoned, and tortured.

Third, the base community understanding of social and ecclesial reality is the starting point for a new “hermeneutic of the people,” or a “theology of the base”. The point of departure of this theology is not a corpus of abstract dogma but the Reality of poverty,

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<sup>4</sup> Marxist analysis has contributed less to Brazilian *comunidade de base* reflection than in some Spanish American countries.

marginalization, injustice, and alienation which surrounds them. It is “the view from the base”—Scripture reread in community from the bottom up. Biblical themes, which have traditionally been interpreted from the optic of the rich and powerful, are now seen through the eyes of the poor and oppressed. Theology, then, becomes “a reflection upon praxis” by the oppressed leading to concrete actions toward their own liberation.

It is a contextualized theology, in the sense that the base communities are theologizing in their own context of poverty and oppression. Contextualization in this case does not mean functional accommodation to the dominant culture. This is a dysfunctional and prophetic contextualization, which challenges dehumanizing cultural norms. The “prophetic discontinuity” of this theology can be seen in the Bible study materials that have grown out of base community reflection (cf. Mesters 1973; Gorgulho 1975; Marins 1978).

Fourth, the *comunidades de base* reflection upon their own social and ecclesial Reality in the light of biblical Reality has led to a new understanding of the Church’s mission. The proclamation of the Gospel—in word and action—is both the *announcement* of salvation and liberation in Jesus Christ and the *denouncement* of everything that oppresses and alienates humanity (cf. Marins 1976b, 1977c, 1977e; Barreiro 1977). It is both re-evangelization of the masses of nominal Christians and prophetic confrontation with the oppressive “powers”. In the words of a Brazilian bishop, “the *comunidades* are the theology of liberation put into practice” (*Time*, May 7, 1979, p.88).

## QUESTIONS FROM AN EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

It is a temptation for the evangelical Protestant to want to impose his or her own understanding of Reality (social, ecclesial, and biblical) upon the Catholic base ecclesial communities. This is a temptation we must avoid if we truly believe in the incarnation of the Gospel into different Realities. Neither can we evaluate the base communities according to our understanding of traditional Roman Catholic Reality. The *comunidades de base* cannot be fully appreciated or objectively critiqued from our own comfortable ivory towers. Incarnation into base community Reality will give us both the experience and the right to make critical observations. Nonetheless, I would suggest four questions that should be asked of the base communities by any student of the movement.

1. Is the *comunidades de base* understanding of Reality complete? Does it deal as adequately with personal sin as it does with institutional sin? Does it give as much weight to sin as transgression against God as it does to sin against neighbour? In what way does the “lostness” of humanity before God relate on one’s intra- and interpersonal alienation?

2. Do the base communities deal adequately with popular religiosity? Granting the need to rediscover and to preserve the liberating cultural and social values of “a religion of the people,” is there not also a need for prophetic denunciation (and exorcism) of the demonic elements in Spiritism and in popular religion?

3. What is the ultimate source of authority for the *comunidades de base*? Is it the Church, socio-economic Reality, or Scripture? In what way do these sources relate to the authority of the Trinity?

4. Does the Catholic *comunidades* concept of conversion-as-a-process exhaust the biblical understanding of conversion? Protestants can indeed be grateful for this counterbalancing of their own emphasis upon conversion-as-a-point-in-time-event. But at what point in the process does conversion-as-an-about-face—as *metanoia*, as turning “to God from idols ... from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God”—take place?

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROTESTANT MISSION

The Catholic *comunidades de base* have profound implications for Protestant mission in Brazil and Spanish America. Virtually all Protestant churches now working in Brazil can trace their roots to base ecclesial communities. The Scottish Covenanters had their outlawed conventicles and the Anabaptists had their persecuted communities. British congregationalism was a grassroots community movement, as were the Methodist “classes”—and the Moravian communities and Society of Friends groups, which work elsewhere in Latin America. The *colegia pietatis* or *ecclesiola in ecclesia* of Francke and Spener have their descendants in some of the Lutheran movements in Brazil. Indigenous Pentecostalism, which accounts for more than two-thirds of Brazilian Protestantism, began as a base church movement.

Yet most Protestant churches today are afraid of the very base church movements that gave them birth. Some churches appear to be more concerned about attaining and maintaining a dubious respectability, even in the face of institutionalized injustice and violence, than in speaking out in defense of fundamental human freedoms. Religious “liberty”—“freedom to preach the Gospel”—takes precedence over other freedoms. Said Father José Marins, after he had been shown the large “cathedral” being built by a Pentecostal pastor, “We are coming from where you are going.” Latin American Protestants are being challenged to consider the possibility that the evangelization of Catholic Latin America may take place, at least in part, within the Catholic Church, and to search for ways in which Protestants can relate to this phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, the *comunidades de base* present their greatest challenge to their own Church. They challenge it, as we have seen, at the levels of sociology, ecclesiology, theology, and mission. How will a church, which is one of the wealthiest, most centralized, and traditional institutions on earth, respond to this challenge from a Church of the poor?

The final document of Puebla, despite its ambivalence at several points, accepts this challenge to its “personal and institutional behaviour”. Quoting from Paul VI, CELAM III defined evangelization in terms of the totality of human needs: “Evangelization will not be complete until there takes place dialogue ... between the Gospel and the personal and social lives of people in the concrete.” Evangelization “must keep the whole man and all men before its eyes and must communicate to them suitably and adequately a particular vigorous message in our time on liberation ... always in the context of the global plan of salvation” (*Evangelii nuntiandi* 29, 38).

The foundational pillars of this evangelization, according to John Paul II, are “the truth about Jesus Christ ... about the Church ... about man.” If these foundations are taken seriously by the hierarchy and the *comunidades de base* leadership, the movement will continue to grow and to fulfil its promise as “a hope (and possibly the hope) of the Church” (*Evangelii nuntiandi* 58).

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# The Kingdom, The Church and a Distressed World

J. Andrew Kirk

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*In this article, Professor Kirk was asked to respond particularly to the documents sent out in preparation for last May's Melbourne gathering of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches. "Your Kingdom Come" took place just one month before the gathering of evangelical leaders in Pattaya, Thailand, organized by the Lausanne Continuation Committee as a follow-up to the 1974 Congress on World Evangelization. At the time of writing, it was Professor Kirk's hope that among themselves and between the two groups "some consensus will develop—at least about priorities, if not about tactics ..." of the Church in the 1980s. He says: "It is mainly about priorities, as I see them in my limited way, that I want to say something in this article."*  
(Editor)

We stand seventy years (one lifetime) on from Edinburgh, that first effervescent, and yet also sober gathering of missionary leaders who met to assess the extent to which the Church had accomplished the task of evangelizing the world 'in its generation'. And seventy years is approximately one-third of the time span which separates us from the beginning of the main non-Roman Catholic missionary movement of the modern era.

Time would not suffice to tell in intricate detail the quantitative and qualitative changes which have taken place since then. Mission 'in our generation' has to take account of a totally different set of circumstances from those experienced by our missionary forefathers. This is obvious; what is not always so obvious is the extent to which the changes have affected (inevitably and rightly) the way we view the challenge of mission today and the theological undergirding which consciously, and often unconsciously, influences our opinions.

In two important senses the modern era began in 1776. In that year the colonies of North America won their independence, and the new nation started on its way to becoming 'top nation'. The consequences of this event were to have a profound effect on the course of world history (as men like Karl Marx were swift to perceive), not least on the development of missionary activity throughout the world. In that year, also, Adam Smith published his celebrated economic tract *Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, which gave, in the words of Daniel Fusfeld, a new lease of life to 'the proposition that a private enterprise economy tends to maximize individual welfare.'<sup>1</sup> It has been humorously suggested that Sir Keith Joseph (Secretary of State for Industry in the present UK government) would exempt from public spending-cuts the gift of Adam Smith's book to every member of the civil service. Be that as it may, the importance of Smith's work lies in its symbolic value as the ideological promoter of the capitalist system of production and distribution, and the particular values of economic growth and consumerism which it enshrines.

American independence and the growth of free-enterprise capitalism are mutually related. Their efforts have penetrated the remotest corners of the globe, doing more to shape the kind of world we live in and the problems we face than any other comparable events of the last two centuries.

Whether we believe that these developments have been mainly beneficial, mostly disastrous, or just a mixed blessing, it is precisely this world in which the Church is called to fulfil its mission. It is a world whose daily political and commercial life is based on the assumption that man's chief end is the pursuit of happiness, to be achieved by the global maximization of goods and services.

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<sup>1</sup> *Economics* (Lexington: D.C. Heath & Co., 1972), p.5.

Maximum productive efficiency requires, amongst other things, political stability (achieved, if necessary, by suspending normal human rights), technological sophistication and rational management, all measured by the rate of return of profit on investment. Or so the story goes. No one on either side of the East-West divide seems able to conceive of a different kind of society, built on different goals and serviced by a different type of economic order. Living standards measured in quantitative terms is the name of the game.

Many Christians, in all honesty, are playing the game in deadly earnest, personally committed to its success, even when this may endanger our health and cause suffering to others, for we are literally and metaphorically up to our eyes in debt to the system. As a result, despite what we may claim about liberty in Christ, we are not free from bondage to a form of life based fundamentally on a non-Christian, imminent view of man and his relationship to the world. Development, progress and the whole future of man are seen in terms which relate almost exclusively to man's possession and manipulation of things. Affluence has dulled our ability to look critically at the ideology of the modern state and its political mentors, and made us vulnerable to the propaganda indiscriminately flung at us with their blessing.

On the other hand, many on the farther side of the North-South divide have been questioning for a long time the underlying philosophical and political assumptions of East and West about welfare and the meaning of existence. Among them are a number of contributors to the pre-Melbourne documents. However, these people do not count for very much, for they live on the outer edge of a world which is driven from the centre and spins on aimlessly into the future. As technology 'advances', so the world spins faster, but those on the circumference experience the unusual sensation of going backwards. But who cares? Maintaining and improving the machinery at the centre keeps those who control the vehicle more than fully occupied. It is inconceivable to them that the world might function much more humanly if the vehicle was modified, its direction changed, and its speed reduced.<sup>2</sup>

As I read the documents circulated for Melbourne I saw the theme 'Your Kingdom Come' transform itself into an enormous illuminated question mark which hovered over the path of the modern world, hurtling on into the 1980s and beyond. It is supremely improbable that 'the rules of the present world order' will experience such a dramatic conversion that they will begin to be concerned above everything else with the kingdom of God and its justice. But Christ's disciples, even when they offer little resistance to the order as it is, might be expected to indulge in a little reflection on what such a concern should imply in the years ahead.

As the Church of this generation takes stock of its witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ, it is faced, I believe, with three inescapable challenges: the kingdom itself; the poor and suffering; and world evangelization. On how it responds to each of these challenges depends largely its ability to be both an agent and concrete evidence for God's new order in Jesus Christ: 'If the tree bears figs next year, so much the better; if not, then cut it down' ([Luke 13:9](#)).

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE KINGDOM

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<sup>2</sup> Kosuke Koyama in his book, *Three Mile an Hour God* (London: SCM, 1979) takes up and develops this theme in relation to the ideology of technological and manufacturing imperialism of which his own country, Japan, is such a prime example.

The theme chosen for the Melbourne conference has a unique significance for the Church's mission today. The idea of the kingdom has come to prominence again in much recent theological thinking; the reasons are not absolutely clear, but one may hazard a few guesses. Firstly, the growing participation of Third World Christian leaders in the counsels of world-wide church bodies has brought to the forefront the political and social implications of the Gospel. Third World Christians have been unavoidably caught up in the political turmoil which since the war has catapulted many of their countries into full independence. At the same time the debate, begun seriously in the 1960s, about the causes of acute deprivation in underdeveloped nations, has been conducted in terms of the exercise of political and economic power. In both instances the biblical understanding of the kingdom has provided a very useful key for discovering relevant guidelines for Christian thought and action in the midst of volatile political situations.

Secondly, the western world in the last two decades has witnessed a notable 'politicization' of life. As other values get crowded out, the power of political decision to remake the world becomes increasingly alluring. Jacques Ellul, among others, has documented this trend.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, political intervention in normal market procedures has become increasingly necessary since the first oil crisis of 1973. Western governments are no longer able to hold the arena whilst industry plans sustained and long-term growth. Rather they have to help promote policies which will keep the advanced industrial nations from tottering over the brink into deep and catastrophic recession. Moreover, short-term political strategy seems to be fast replacing any pretence at definable political goals. This is partly due to the long, slow ebb of clear ethical values as guidelines for the use of power. As long as life's meaning is defined primarily in terms of the freedom to consume, then politicians will see their task as basically defending the standard of living against the loss of real earnings. Present economic strategies, however different they may appear (whether monetarist, protectionist, or conceivably both), are only distinct means to reach the same end. The end is not debated (except by rather fringe groups like the anti-nuclear lobby), basically, I believe, because a hedonist life-style has informed our opinions for so long now that we have lost the memory for an ethic which exalts values like generosity, self-sacrifice, restraint, equality, solidarity and personal creativity. Political debate and decision-making can only rise above majority opinion about life's meaning and an acceptable code of moral behaviour with great difficulty.

Christians in the West have been forced to become more closely involved in political discussion and action by the direct effects of both the economic crisis and present ethical bewilderment. Searching for guidelines to direct their thinking on matters formerly taken up by a few enthusiasts who felt a vocation for politics, Christians have discovered that a prolonged and deep-seated tendency to divorce faith from public life has left them naked in the grand arena of political debate. Great biblical doctrines like justification, regeneration and sanctification are not sufficient to give clear principles for social action in a political scene characterized by power struggles, pragmatism and personal ambition. The concept of the kingdom, however its relevance may be understood in detail, quite clearly gives this social and political orientation.

Thirdly, the 1960s saw the beginnings of a sizeable shift of emphasis in theological circles from concern about individual salvation and personal existential authenticity to concern about the dehumanizing effects of structures. In my judgement, the greatest single catalyst to produce this change has been a new 'humanist' Marxism. There is no space to trace this

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<sup>3</sup> In, for example, *The Political Illusion* (London: Vintage Books, 1973).

fascinating story, but the epic of the Christian-Marxist dialogue and liberation theology (in all its forms) is well known. Suffice it to say that Christian theology is seeking to ascertain which elements of the biblical message speak most directly to aspirations for social justice, revolutionary change and a utopian future. The kingdom tops the list of candidates.

For these reasons, and others, the category of the kingdom is once again in the forefront of our understanding of the full significance of Christ. Just as there is no chance of attaining the life of the kingdom without Jesus, so there is no way of understanding Jesus without the kingdom. I want to try and say something about its absolute centrality to our understanding of the Church's contemporary witness to Jesus. In a sense my remarks will constitute an apologia for what has come to be called 'kingdom theology' or sometimes (particularly in the USA) a 'kingdom agenda'.

We start from the universally recognized historical fact that the kingdom was the central point of Jesus' preaching, ministry and self-understanding.<sup>4</sup>

It has often been pointed out that Jesus does not define the kingdom, but simply announces its coming: 'The kingdom of God has drawn near' ([Mark 1:15](#)); 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God ... because that is what God sent me to do' ([Luke 4:43](#)). This is true in the sense that no theoretical definition is given such as might satisfy the overdeveloped rational consciousness of the West. However, Jesus' ministry leaves many clues scattered around which, when pieced together, help us to understand what he meant by the kingdom. Were this not so, his life would be a complete enigma.

The kingdom is not an idea Jesus invented. He assumes the longstanding Jewish expectation that God would establish his kingdom in a very specific way. How one understands Jesus' preaching of the kingdom depends very largely on the degree of continuity one allows between the Old Testament announcement of the kingdom and Jesus' interpretation of the goal of his ministry.<sup>5</sup> Does the emphasis fall on the fulfilment of prophecy whose content and meaning is already accepted? Or did Jesus give a substantially new meaning to the original promises?

For many generations Christians have been fed on the notion that the kingdom refers firstly to an individual experience of God's rule over their lives, and secondly to a heaven of righteousness and peace to be revealed at the end of time. From where has this teaching come? From the Old Testament? From Jesus? From Paul? Or from the deep, insidious and prolonged infiltration of Greek dualistic thought into theology? To try to answer these questions we need to look briefly at some of the biblical evidence about the kingdom.

In the Old Testament the kingdom is associated with God's rule over the universe, the nations and Israel. The first specific announcement is made in the song of Moses and the people after the crossing of the Sea ([Ex. 15:8](#)). It is explicitly reiterated in the famous terms of the covenant: 'You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' ([Ex. 19:6](#)).

God's kingship over everything created is closely linked to the events of the Exodus and the covenant. When, later on, the Hebrew people demand a king of their own, God reminds

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<sup>4</sup> In the preparatory documents there are studies on the kingdom from groups of Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians. They all emphasize this very point.

<sup>5</sup> The way in which we depict the relationship between the Old and New Testament is probably the key to our assessment of most 'political' theologies. I would suggest that most of us have been taken somewhat by surprise at this point and find little help from our traditional doctrinal schemes in relating to the challenges which these theologies identify.

them that they have rejected him as their king, the one who 'rescued you from the Egyptians and all the other peoples who were oppressing you' ([1 Sam. 10:17–9](#); [8:4–9](#)).

Indeed, throughout the Old Testament God's kingship is seen in close relationship to the exercise of authority and power by the human kings: sometimes positively, as in the case of David ([2 Sam. 7:4–17](#)), but mostly negatively. What Samuel promised would come to pass ([1 Sam. 8:11–8](#)) happened exactly as he predicted. Successive kings, acting like Pharaoh to God's people, trampled on the terms of the covenant, forced them into slavery again, and brought Israel's God into disrepute among her neighbours.

Much of the dynamic of the Old Testament experience of God can be seen in contrast to daily experience of human authority. [Psalms 145](#) and [146](#), for example, remind us that it is God's nature as king to intervene to *satisfy every basic need* of man, to *uphold justice and equity*, to *watch over the circumstances of strangers, widows and orphans*, and to *liberate the poor and the prisoners*. This is the concrete reality of God's 'everlasting kingdom' and 'his dominion (which) endures throughout all generations' ([Ps. 145:13](#)). It is precisely these tasks which the kings abandoned: 'Stop doing evil and learn to do right. See that justice is done, help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows' ([Is. 1:17](#)).

God's kingdom, then, is the detailed expression of his caring control of the whole of life. Because the kings whom God appointed did not recognize their responsibility to pursue a policy of equality and harmony amongst the people, but used their position to amass wealth for themselves ([Is. 5:8](#); [Mic. 2:2](#)), God deposed them and anointed another king who shared his own characteristics entirely: 'A child is born to us ... and he will be our ruler ... His royal power will continue to grow; his kingdom will always be at peace. He will rule as King David's successor, basing his power on right and justice' ([Is. 9:6–7](#)).

The anointed one (Messiah) is spoken of many times in the Psalms and Prophets. His principal tasks are 'to establish justice on the earth' and 'to proclaim that the time of God's salvation has come' ([Is. 42:4](#); [61:2](#)). This time, when the Lord will come 'to proclaim (fulfil) my covenant' ([Mal. 3:1](#)) is a time both of judgement and recreation ([Zech. 9:9–17](#)). Many of the messianic passages paint a picture of universal peace and prosperity ([Mic. 4:1–4](#); [Is. 25:6–9](#), [35:1–10](#), [65:17–25](#)), which will embrace man's relationship to nature ([Is. 11:6–9](#)), to fellow humans and to God.

The kingdom is the manifestation of God's just and compassionate ordering of the whole of human life in society. It is the effective execution of his love. It is the complete reversal of all the consequences of man's evil: death, disease, plagues, enmity, famine, hate, greed, exploitation, idolatry, oppression, violence, culpable ignorance, prejudice and empty religious practices. It is the establishing of a new kind of community based on open and generous sharing according to such legislation as the sabbatical and jubilee year ([Lev. 25](#); [Deut. 15](#)). It is a totally new order of things, the very antithesis of life in Egypt. If we may be bold enough to borrow the words of another, it is 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all.'<sup>6</sup> It is a utopian vision of life in the messianic age.

As we turn to the New Testament, two central questions pose themselves. Firstly, did Jesus accept this understanding of the kingdom? Secondly, did he believe he had come to establish the kingdom in this way? At this stage we cannot attempt to answer them in detail; we will therefore indicate a few lines for further investigation.

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.105.



The prominence of the kingdom in Christ's preaching was extended both to his most immediate disciples ([Luke 9:2](#)) and to the wider group ([Luke 10:9–11](#)). It was still present after his resurrection, though certainly mentioned less frequently ([Acts 1:3](#), [8:12](#), [14:22](#), [19:8](#), [20:25](#), [28:23](#), [31](#)). There may be, however, some significance in the fact that Luke opens and closes his account of the expansion of the witness to Jesus with explicit references to the kingdom. A considerable problem, however, arises in the case of Paul. He mentions the kingdom infrequently in comparison with other themes (14 times).<sup>7</sup> If, as we have been claiming, the kingdom is absolutely central to our understanding of the entire message of Scripture, this comparative absence does need accounting for.

I would make three suggestions to explain this curious fact. Firstly, Paul may simply have taken Jesus' teaching about the kingdom for granted. It is inconceivable that he was unaware of it. There is nothing anomalous about the story of Paul in Rome explaining to local Jewish leaders the 'message about the kingdom of God, and ... about Jesus' ([Acts 28:23](#)). When he wrote to the church in Rome to give his explanation of the Gospel, it is natural to believe that he was talking about the 'good news of the kingdom'. The one time in Romans when he explicitly mentions the kingdom ([Rom. 14:17](#)) he seems to be reaffirming the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. [Matt. 5:6](#), [9](#), [10](#), [12](#) and [6:31](#) with [5:20](#) and [6:33](#)). The context ([Rom. 14:1ff](#)) seems to be a commentary on Jesus' saying in [Mark 7:15a](#): 'There is nothing that goes into a person from the outside which can make him ritually unclean.' Paul is absolutely convinced that the fulness of the kingdom spells freedom, because Jesus himself had already embodied that freedom.

Paul also expressly recognizes the importance of [Psalm 110](#) as the prophetic basis for certainty concerning the coming of the kingdom in the defeat of all God's enemies, of which death is both the summary and the culmination ([1 Cor. 15:24–8](#)). It is more than probable that Paul sees Christ's resurrection in this passage as the definitive enthronement of the Messiah. In his use of [Psalm 110](#) and the royal Psalms, Paul acknowledges the same Old Testament background as Jesus. We can only surmise that the historical occasions of his letters did not necessitate any further elaboration.

Secondly, though admittedly this is an argument from silence, it may be that Paul did not want to use an idea for his predominantly Gentile congregations which would not have made as much sense in the political context of the Greek city-states as in that of Jewish history. If this is a reasonable assumption, then we can go on to suggest, thirdly, that Paul, a highly creative thinker, used different terminology to convey the same reality as that expressed by kingdom. Though unable to argue this exegetically here, I believe that those passages which deal with the two ages (Adam/Christ), the redemption of creation ([Rom. 8:18ff](#)), Christ's victory over the powers ([Rom. 8:38ff](#); [Col. 2:15](#)), and the new community of reconciled people ([Gal. 3:28](#); [Eph. 2:13–18](#); [Col. 3:10–11](#)), express the same fact as the Gospels that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, the kingdom has arrived.

If these suggestions are accepted, then our thesis that Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom is the central message of the apostolic church is not challenged by lack of explicit mention of the kingdom in Paul.

Concerning the two questions posed earlier about Jesus' selfunderstanding, I believe both can be answered affirmatively. There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that Jesus

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<sup>7</sup> The list includes two references in 2 Timothy, one in Ephesians, and two in Colossians, all of whose Pauline authorship has been disputed. However, personally, I can see little beyond speculation for denying their genuineness.

reinterpreted the goal of God's kingly rule as anything other than the complete reclamation and reconstitution of the created universe. Jesus himself reversed all the consequences of sin: disease, demon-possession, guilt, ritualistic and empty religion, a caste system of purity and impurity, scarcity of food, a hostile nature, commercial exploitation and death. The transfiguration shows plainly the conjunction of the resurrection life with physical existence. Finally, Jesus' frequent meals with his disciples and others, culminating in the celebration of the Passover, are portrayed as anticipations of the messianic banquet ([Mark 2:15–9](#); [Luke 22:14–8](#)).

Mark, particularly, portrays Jesus as the second Adam who, leaving behind the desert and a struggle with wild animals (both representing an antithesis to the original garden which was fertile and whose animal population was tame and under Adam's control), and beginning with the defeat of the tempter, begins to undo all the effects of the fall.

Jesus, I believe, did presume that he was anointed by his Father to establish the new order. The signs he did were not intended simply to 'prove' that he was the Messiah, but to demonstrate that the Old Testament prophecies about the new age were actually being enacted at that precise moment: 'Go, and tell John what you are *seeing and hearing*.'<sup>8</sup>

In Jesus Christ 'the powers of the age to come' are present in contemporary world history. Though the kingdom will come in its triumphal fulness only at the end of present time, in a sense it has already fully come in Jesus. The most explicit evidence of its activity is the opposition which it arouses from those whose security in the age of sin and death is shaken and rebuked ([Matt. 11:12](#); [John 15:18–21](#), [16:1–4](#)). Those who belong to 'this world' are those who own it: the rich, political rulers, religious leaders, the wise and understanding. To enter the kingdom they must become like children; but as they have so much to give up—wealth, power, prestige, privilege and knowledge—it will be virtually impossible for them to leave the foremost positions in one age to become 'the least in the kingdom' ([Mark 10:21–3](#)). But those who are least in this age—the poor, oppressed, sinners, outcasts (tax-collectors and prostitutes), lepers and the ignorant—'will come from the east and the west and sit down ... at the feast in the kingdom of heaven' ([Matt. 8:11](#), [21:31](#), [22:9–10](#)).

The kingdom challenges us today in two fundamental ways: firstly, to recognize the reality of the presence of God's new order in present history (to pray 'your kingdom come' implies both that it is already here and that it needs to be more completely manifest); secondly, to understand that wherever the kingdom is present, the values and structures of the present age will be reversed ([Luke 1:51–3](#)). For example, Christ's kingdom is 'not of this world' precisely in the sense that his disciples are not to use violence to repay violence ([John 18:36](#)). In the next sections we will continue to explore the implications of this challenge.

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE POOR AND SUFFERING

More than fifty years ago J. H. Oldham, one of the early leaders of the IMC, wrote words which, though prophetic then and familiar to us now through the influence of liberation theology, have still to be properly implemented: 'When Christians find in the world a state of things which is not in accord with the truth they have learned from Christ, their concern is

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<sup>8</sup> The most explicit passages about the present fulfilment of the kingdom apart from the ones already quoted are: [Matt. 4:23–4](#), [7:11](#), [8:22](#), [9:15](#), [9:16–7](#), [9:35–7](#), [10:7–8](#), [10:34–6](#), [11:12](#), [11:28–30](#), [12:28](#), [13:52](#), [15:28](#), [15:30–1](#), [16:28](#), [21:1ff](#), [21:31–2](#), [28:18](#); [Luke 4:18–21](#).

not that it should be explained but that it should be ended.<sup>9</sup> It is symptomatic of the inadequacy of much of the contemporary Church's theology, structures, and commitment to mission that so often the poor become the object of our controversies, rather than of our compassionate and suffering action.

In recent years much theological ink has been split debating the meaning of two texts from the Gospels: 'Blessed are the poor' ([Luke 6:20](#)), and 'He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor' ([Luke 4:18](#)). A lot of effort is wasted in trying to demonstrate that Christ's consistent attitude to wealth and poverty cannot be as radical as it seems. The kind of exegetical special-pleading generously dished out to suggest, for example, that Christ was more interested in motives towards wealth than in its possession and use, provides genuine insights into how ideological defence-mechanisms obstruct our endeavours at objective interpretation. Needless to say, the attempts to circumvent the plain meaning of the texts are made exclusively by those who have never experienced, and maybe never even encountered, the utterly dehumanizing effects of physical misery.

Controversy over the meaning of poverty today increases in the case of the economic explanations advanced to account for its steady increase in a world also experiencing growing abundance.

The standard explanation given by economists in the neo-classical (capitalist) tradition is that poverty, defined as lack of goods and services, is due exclusively to deficient productive capacity. An analogy is often drawn between successive periods of development in one country and the present development gap between nations. The assumption is that development is simply a matter of time, and comes when the right technology is applied to the right resources in a freeenterprise economic system. Thus, for example, Michael Alison, MP argues in a recent article<sup>10</sup> that the poor nations need a good dose of the old-fashioned 'Protestant work ethic' if they are to solve their economic problems and become eventually a high-level consumer society.

Marxists give very different reasons for the existence of poverty in some nations and affluence in others. To begin with, they read history in another way. Fundamental to their analysis of the development of economic systems is their theory of conflict. They point out, for example, that in the eighteenth century there were a number of flourishing commercial centres outside Europe (notably India and Indonesia) whose economies were in many ways superior to those of Europe. However, these countries came under the colonial domination of western powers, and their economies, thereafter, were made to subserve the interests of the colonial power. In India, for example, incipient textile industries were dismantled because they would have provided unfair competition to the Lancashire mills.

Thus, from the late eighteenth century onwards, a pattern of development and trade began to emerge across the world in which the stronger nations of Europe and North America were able to impose terms always beneficial to themselves. Much of the rapid industrial growth of the West can only be accounted for on the grounds that the natural resources of the colonies were unfairly exploited, while their industrialization was hampered by the militarily, economically and politically more powerful nations to the north.

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<sup>9</sup> *Christianity and the Race Problem* (London: SCM, 1926), p.26, quoted in J. D. Gott, 'Jerusalem 1928: Mission, Kingdom and Church', *IRM*, Vol. 67, No. 267, 1978, p.293.

<sup>10</sup> 'World Poverty and Christian Responsibility: a critical study of Ronald Sider's thesis in *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*', *Christian Graduate*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1979.

These two explanations (obviously simplified here) are poles apart. The first believes that the chief cause of actual discrepancies in levels of development is different *attitudes* to work. The second believes that the cause must be found in the *material* base of society, because economic systems in real life automatically operate to the advantage of those able to secure and control the means of production.

My own opinion is that both explanations are partly right, but that the second one is much closer to the reality of the current economic situation. Certainly, the so-called 'Protestant ethic' helps to explain why the northern European countries, steeped in the Reformation tradition, pursued so vigorously a free-enterprise system of production some time before the southern European ones. But as an explanation of current discrepancies in wealth it is far too simplistic. Hard work, initiative, frugality and risk may all have played their part in the initial stages of capitalist development, at a time when the fierce competition for markets and resources which characterizes today's world was comparatively unknown, but they are no match at all for the existence of commodity-pricing control, trade preferential agreements, import barriers, multi-national corporations, international currency liquidity, etc. Michael Alison's model for development is taken out of a standard (western) economic text-book; unfortunately it bears little resemblance to the real world.

The capitalist model of development conveniently ignores the fact that underdeveloped countries are not competing in the same kind of world as 200 years ago. It is an idealistic theory without any sense of history.

There is, moreover, another fallacy in Alison's argument. Whereas production is necessary to create wealth and gives access to goods and services, by itself it does nothing to eliminate poverty. In Brazil in the last fifteen years there has been phenomenal productive growth. At the same time the per capita real income of the lowest earning 75 per cent of the population has decreased, so that there is now more widescale absolute poverty than there was a decade ago. The proof is in the pudding. The existence of the Third World poor on an increasing scale is a permanent rebuke to the present international economic order based on the supremacy of relative economic bargaining power. Though its theories may look attractive when wrapped up in graphs and equations, its results in ending poverty are nil. What a man can consume (including basic amenities) is based on what he can sell. This latter is determined by a complex, interrelated world economic structure, backed by a powerful and articulate political ideology.

Of course, Alison and those who think like him are right to stress that the present system also favours the interests of the enormously wealthy, highly privileged, doctrinaire, ruling élites of many Third World countries. Before poverty can really be tackled there, huge political changes will be needed.

But the West cannot sit back and wash its hands of all responsibility. In a highly illuminating paragraph, Alison concludes his arguments by stating that 'the wealth of the West is derived not from the heartless greed of the affluent minority, or their exploitation of the numberless poor in the Third World. On the contrary, it derives from a break-through in the organization of the processes of wealthcreation, i.e., in human productivity itself originating in non-material Christian moral qualities. The danger of Sider's polemic ... is that (it will induce) a Christian sense of guilt about wealth.'<sup>11</sup> One must say in response to this, in all brotherly charity, that it is a most comfortable belief to hold when you happen to enjoy most of the trimmings of affluence. Indeed, if one is going to enjoy the 'good life' without qualms, it is a necessary belief.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

Unfortunately, the Bible takes a much less sanguine view of the causes of poverty and attitude towards riches. In another paper<sup>12</sup> I have given considerable textual evidence to show that the biblical writers (especially in the Old Testament) make a careful distinction between the creation of wealth and the possession of wealth. The creation has been given to the entire human race to enjoy to the full. There is an abundance of supplies to satisfy everyone's needs. By hard work and the use of his natural skills man may create wealth for himself, and then enjoy what it provides. But, and this is the background of the prophetic condemnation of injustices and oppression, no one should be allowed to accumulate great wealth for himself. Accumulation, as the result of honest labour, was for the benefit of all the people; private accumulation, however, was necessarily the result of the violent exploitation of the weak. The point of the story of Naboth's vineyard ([1 Kings 21](#)) was not to show God's approval of the inviolability of private property, but to protect access to life's basic needs from the unscrupulous greed of the powerful.

The economic system set out by God in the provisions of the covenant, and backed by the uncompromising stand of the prophets, was geared to satisfying the *needs* of every person (and particularly the defenceless)—'Give us today the food we need' ([Matt. 6:11](#), TEV). The present capitalist economic order—a far cry from any idealized society based on the Christian values of hard work, compassion and sharing—is basically a want-satisfying system.<sup>13</sup> Protestantism believed that honest, hard work glorified God and therefore helped to fulfil man's purpose for existing. This belief became buried under the Enlightenment view of man which, believing that consumption equalled happiness, produced a system in which the accumulation of wealth was pursued for its own sake.

The present capitalist system is based on this latter view of man; its survival depends on its ability to persuade people to go on believing the myth. That is why radical Christians, who attempt to apply biblical norms to economic life, are considered subversive by governments of every shade of political opinion. When Christians, therefore, continue to support the system, on the grounds that it incorporates values derived from the Reformation, they ignore both history and the real world.

The continuing existence of the poor is a tremendous challenge to the theology, conscience and action of Christians everywhere, and a touchstone of the authenticity of our witness to Jesus. Can we be serious about a worldwide Christian *community* when there is still great disparity of wealth among different branches of the Christian Church? The early Church rejected such a possibility as a contradiction of the Gospel. The present Church still debates the issue theologically whilst, in practice, declaring that ownership of this world's goods has nothing to do with 'spiritual' fellowship. In the light of Scripture and the present world economic imbalance, does the Church have a special calling to the poor, and to be willing to suffer for the realization of a more just society everywhere? So often our standards are double: We commend Christian dissidents in Russia and Eastern Europe and we condemn them in Latin America, Southern Africa, the Philippines and South Korea. Finally, are we prepared to back our convictions that wealth-ownership and distribution under the

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<sup>12</sup> *The Origin of Accumulated Wealth*, Occasional Paper (Nottingham: Shaftesbury Project, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> C. T. Kurien, *Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1978) discusses the differences in the ownership of wealth in terms of the historical development of a need-based economy being overtaken and engulfed by a want-based economy. He draws from the facts of Indian economic history.

present system is inherently unjust by promoting, at whatever cost to our life-style, systematic study and action to produce a new order which favours the present poor? Do we see a task like this as an integral part of our witness to the Gospel ([2 Cor. 9:10-5](#))? That, perhaps, is one of the most crucial questions with which we need to grapple.

## THE CHALLENGE OF WORLD EVANGELIZATION

Much of what we have said about the kingdom and poverty still needs to be heard and assimilated by evangelical Christians around the world. There are encouraging signs that this is beginning to happen on an increasing scale. Alfred Krass believes that such a shift is taking place within evangelical circles that 'a new movement in the Church, not just a sub-group within evangelicalism', is being constituted by 'the radical evangelicals'.<sup>14</sup> I believe he may be right. The differences are not due to divergent views on scriptural inspiration and authority, as Arthur Johnston maintains,<sup>15</sup> for then the radicals would cease to be evangelicals, but to a different understanding of the range and implications of the Gospel.

Evangelicals who have come to appreciate that active care for the poor and oppressed is a non-negotiable part of Christian discipleship, and who believe, furthermore, that concern must take the form of deep *structural* changes in society in order that God's 'will be done on earth as it is in heaven', are not about to abandon all commitment to personal evangelism. Again, if they did this, they would cease to be evangelicals. It is easy for some evangelicals, playing on fears, suspicions and ignorance, to apply the domino theory to others by suggesting that interest in social matters will automatically lessen commitment to evangelism; or that, as soon as they accept the same kind of agenda as non-evangelicals, who are embarrassed by the challenge of personal faith in Christ, they will become absorbed by secondary tasks.

However, such reasoning lacks theological depth, for it begs the question as to what the Gospel is *all* about. The so-called 'radical' evangelicals think and act as they do, because they are gripped by a fresh vision of the Gospel which they believe is more faithful to scriptural teaching than the one they held before. Above all, they are struggling to integrate their Christian witness, so that evangelism, social involvement, personal integrity and growth in the knowledge of God and in Christian fellowship become indispensable facets of one many-sided spectrum.

Their belief in evangelism is no less intense, for they are convinced that men and women who do not put their faith in Jesus as their allsufficient Saviour and Lord are lost for eternity. Nevertheless, they view evangelism in the wider context of the coming of the kingdom in power.

Biblically the Gospel refers first and foremost to the good news that, despite all appearances to the contrary, 'God reigns' ([Is. 52:7](#)). The good news concerns God's activity in establishing a new order in Christ Jesus. Proclaiming this good news involves inviting anyone who will to enter into the kingdom, taking upon them Christ's yoke ([Matt. 11:29-30](#)) and following him.

In evangelism, the call to faith in Jesus, the Saviour, is inseparable from the call to submit to him as Lord, not only personal lives and lifestyles, but also political and economic systems in the corporate life of society. In evangelism, the free *offer* of forgiveness and new life is

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<sup>14</sup> 'Conversion in the United States Today', *IRM*, Vol. 68, No. 270, 1979, p.154.

<sup>15</sup> *The Battle for Evangelism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1978).

inseparable from the *demand* to reorientate one's life completely around the values of the kingdom as manifested in the life of Jesus. Justification by grace alone through faith alone is matched by justification by works. Under no circumstances can salvation be earned, but nor is it a package whose chief function is to supply the one missing commodity of the consumer society—the gift of permanent happiness. That is cheap grace, totally degrading to the majesty of the biblical Messiah, and contemptuous of the significance of the cross. Faith and action, belief and life, personal and social, spiritual and material, present and future—'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.' So radical evangelicals are probably more committed to biblical evangelism than others who tend to restrict the Gospel to personal repentance and faith.

As far as Melbourne 1980 and the on-going life of the CWME are concerned, we are still not hearing from that quarter an unmistakable, clarion call to personal evangelism. The preparatory documents still reflect much uncertainty. Though evangelicals are not yet fully agreed on the complete meaning of evangelism, within the WCC constituency there is much more confusion.

I believe that two aspects of contemporary life have particularly influenced what might generally be called the WCC climate of opinion: In the West it is secularization, and in the East the resurgence of nationalism and religious conviction.

Secularism has pushed the Church of the West into a tight corner, forcing it to compromise its faith in two main ways. Firstly, Christian belief has become weak at those points where it does not seem to coincide with the demands of a radical naturalism. Cardinal doctrines such as the historicity of Adam and Eve, the virgin birth and the physical resurrection of Christ, for which a consensus has existed for eighteen hundred years, are now considered by many as, at best, optional extras, irrelevant to the heart of Christianity which centres on Jesus' humanity. Secondly, Christian faith has been transformed into a private, inner relationship between a person and God, with ethical implications only for individual behaviour. This 'privatization' of faith has caused Christianity to be seen as one way of life among many, valid but optional, in a pluralistic and multi-religious society. In both cases there has been a loss of conviction about the uniqueness of Christ, with devastating consequences for evangelism.

In Europe, particularly, the Church has become apologetic about representing a Christ who alone can offer true salvation and produce a new order. Aggressive evangelism, such as is common in Latin America and Africa, has become muted in the face of alternative claims to salvation (Marxism, technology, astrology, etc.). The Church seems to have lost its nerve, unwilling to speak prophetically against the idolatry of greed which motivates so much of life. Perhaps the Church is fearful of judgement beginning with itself.

Resurgent religions in the East are challenging the biblical revelation of the finality of Christ. As long ago as 1938, and significantly in the context of the Madras conference of the IMC, little agreement was reached on how Christians should approach people of other religions. As at Nairobi in 1975, the draft report was sent back by the plenary session.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the issues surrounding the proclamation of the Gospel to people of other faiths are complex. Evangelicals have been particularly insensitive and withdrawn culturally, tending to maintain their life in a ghetto, far removed from the struggles to promote genuine respect

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. E. J. Schoonhoven, 'Tambaram 1938', *IRM*, Vol. 67, No. 267, 1978, pp.309–12. He concludes: 'In all honesty it must be recognized that up to the present we have not got much further with the problem in our ecumenical and missionary thinking.' Also David M. Paton, *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975* (London: SPCK, 1976), pp.70–3.



for human dignity. But the dialogical approach to witness championed so vigorously by non-evangelical Christians, has not produced any notable growth in the number of people coming to acknowledge Jesus as the only way of salvation.

The challenge of world evangelization comes in different ways to all Christians. Evangelicals should reconsider whether their preaching of the Gospel incorporates the entire sweep of the good news announced by Jesus and the apostolic church. Non-evangelicals should take seriously the fact that Jesus not only proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom to the *poor*, but also came to seek and to save the *lost*. The participants of the Melbourne conference need to affirm their unwavering commitment to such past resolutions of the IMC as the following: 'As in the past so also in the present, the gospel is the only way of salvation ... the gospel is the answer to the world's greatest need ... Its very nature forbids us to say that it may be the right belief for some but not for others. Either it is true for all, or it is not true at all.'<sup>17</sup>

If both these challenges were met then there would be some hope that Christians of different heritages could respond together to John Mott's famous watchword: 'The evangelization of the world in this generation'—to take the whole gospel to the whole person in the whole world until Jesus comes.

## CONCLUSIONS

A new decade challenges the Church to halt its endless production of programmes, resolutions, committees, world and regional conferences and, above all, take stock of its actual and future commitment to world mission. The encouragements and warnings of our forebears since 1910 stimulate us to carry on the task of witnessing faithfully to our generation. In the light of the issues I have raised in these pages I would like to be bold (and, no doubt, foolhardy) enough to suggest the following priorities for the Christian community in Britain.

1. *To discover a new style of leadership.* There is at present too great a divorce between a formally chosen and God-anointed leadership. In all the churches there exist bishops who are such in name only, and those who exercise an episcopal ministry in fact. And when the two do coincide, the machinery of office tends to inhibit the exercise of Spirit-given gifts. As a result, the laity are frustrated; God's people are still largely 'frozen'; *de jure* mediocrity suppresses, or at least controls institutionally, *de facto* leadership. By contrast, the majority of prophets in Israel were 'laymen', who particularly denounced the ritual performance of the sacraments. Whenever such are absent from God's people, God's Word is silent.

2. *To liberate itself from all the manifest and hidden trappings of 'folk-religion'.* In many respects the Church has allowed the social expectations of non-Christians to determine its ministry. It is used as a prop to bolster the cultural and moral heritage of the nation and to provide a bulwark against the disintegration of certain institutions. As a result, the eschatological challenge of the kingdom to the Church to be a *communio viatorum* (a company of pilgrims) is obscured. The Church very often acts as a haven to receive and protect those whom Peter Berger calls 'homeless'—those who cannot withstand the anomie of modern existence—rather than being a community which makes people whole and then infiltrates them into society as salt and light. It would appear that many clergymen get

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<sup>17</sup> *Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24–April 8, 1928* (The Jerusalem Series), 8 vols. (London: OUP, 1928), Vol. 1, p.483.



caught up in servicing folk-religion under the pressure to find a sense of purpose in their ministry.

3. *To integrate practically evangelism and social involvement.* Though the search for a theologically responsible solution to the question of missionary priorities is urgently needed, theoretical answers are not so important as a practical demonstration, at local and national level, of a ministry which embodies personal evangelism, church planting, leadership training, service in the community, the support of those involved in political life and the media, and a prophetic testimony on the great issues of the day.

4. *To acquire skill in reading the signs of the times.* Daily life seems to be made up of two kinds of historical movement: the ephemeral, constantly changing flux of transient affairs, which flash momentarily upon our screens and then pass from view to be replaced by new actors on the stage; and the much more permanent underlying trends (religious, economic, political and cultural) which shape the future of societies. It is these latter which Christians, with the aid of what is valid biblically in the social sciences and from the perspective of revelation, ought to be discerning and evaluating critically.

5. *To renew its commitment to world evangelization.* 1980, with its two world conferences on mission and evangelism, provides a remarkable opportunity to reappraise and reconfirm our unstinted commitment to communicate the good news of Jesus and the kingdom to every living person. Today Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and China — areas where the vast majority of the world's population lives — present the greatest challenge. Latin American, North American and African churches continue to want sensitive support from other branches of the world Church. But in view of their own dynamic capacity for witness and the extent of their missionary penetration, this does not need to be so extensive as in other areas of the globe.

Missionary activity from Britain needs to turn a new corner with an appreciation of the full scope of the biblical Gospel, cultural sensitivity, real partnership, absence of all forms of triumphalism (especially the temptation to rely on massive financial support) and paternalism, a willingness to defend the rights of the powerless and underprivileged and the struggle for a more kingdom-like society. Only thus may we honour the one to whom we bear testimony and perpetuate the work of 'that great crowd of witnesses' who, before us, 'have fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith.'

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## Evangelism and Power

William E. Pannell

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The restaurant was simple in decor with a faint hint of a Spanish motif. Across the blue-green grass the mist of morning slowly drifted away on the incoming breeze. We had met for breakfast, my friend, the agent for one of America's fine publishing houses and I in my role as a professor of evangelism at a west coast seminary. The pleasantries ended; I heard my friend recount his recent visit to a southern city where he had attended a meeting of one of this country's famous evangelists. "But," he said, "there were hardly any black people there. Yet, when I walked outside that immense stadium, I had the impression that the crusade was held in the heart of the city—there were black people all over the place. I can't understand that."

Well, neither can that evangelist, for if you were to ask him about this seeming contradiction he would recount the many ways he and his team had sought to involve the black community in the crusade. They would have met with the black clergymen and would have had key black persons on some of their committees. Officially the evangelist would assert that everything possible was done to ensure participation from this and indeed all minority communities. Implicit in his explanation would be a silent disappointment relieved only by the feeling that they had done all they could.

The stadium is likely to be one of the newer marvels of technology—a vast expanse suitable for football or soccer, yet completely covered at the dome. The floor of this architectural wonder is often of soft, spongy material of carpet-like feel, usually in a shade of luxurious green. The cost of such a palace, devoted to the craze for sports, is always in the millions, and those who profit from the enterprise, often the owners of those sports teams, usually find a way to do so at public expense. The land upon which this complex was built is most often public land, or land occupied by the poor in or near the central city. After it is legally condemned, the people re-located, and the area re-zoned, it is sold to these public benefactors who promise to "bring a championship to the city". The argument is usually couched in civic terms which give the impression that the enterprise will enhance the area, provide jobs, and produce additional tax revenues for the city.

To make all of this possible, it is also necessary to provide suitable access to the complex. It should be near a freeway so that the folks can get into the area from the suburbs, and preferably near bus transportation so the people from the city can get there too. After all, as the publicists will say, this is "your stadium," this is "your team". Well, not really. The cheapest seat will usually be \$10 for football. The best seats are often bought up by businessmen and corporations for their executives and important guests, with the remaining seats gobbled up by season-ticket fans.

The event mentioned by my friend was no athletic contest. It was a crusade—a religious crusade, and the faithful have gathered. It makes little difference who sponsors this event, Protestant or Catholic, cultist or internationally known evangelist. And the parable will be the same from Boston to Los Angeles. Religion will be seen to occupy the space made possible by the exploitation of the powerless. The scenario is predictable. The mayor or other high official of the city will extend a public welcome to the "evangelist," make some attempt at assessing the potential moral benefit of such a gathering and to mild applause will sit down. (Even religious folk have learned to expect little from politicians.)

The question this spectacle raises has to do with the professed faith of this crowd and the process by which this complex came into being. Where were these people when the decisions were made to condemn this property? Where were they when the powerless were relocated? When the bulldozers smashed their way through the old neighbourhood? The issue is one of ethics, and when that issue is raised among a gathered throng at a Protestant or Catholic crusade the silence is deafening.

The irony of this religious event is that the people who are the professed object of concern are not in attendance. They've been displaced by the heavy equipment of the mayor's office—often the very man who gives the opening welcome. And their absence is not due finally to their poverty. More often than not it is due to their understanding of the uncritical association between those who prefer sport to people and those who use the situation to proclaim "the Gospel".

The sad reality is that the evangelist and his entourage are often ignorant of the way in which the displaced persons view them. It could scarcely be otherwise. The evangelist is usually housed in splendid hotels, treated with a round of events sponsored by the wealthy to reach the wealthy. At the meetings they will occupy the best seats. The press and electronic media will have been courted also, and their representatives will be provided with choice space in the stadium. In short, all the agencies which serve the vested interests of the powerful will have been courted in order to give the crusade an aura of respectability. It would rarely occur to these religious leaders that these very agencies are the conduits through which flow injustice to the little people. Thus the Gospel is condemned in the eyes of many because of its associations.

## **POWER AND PREACHING THE GOSPEL**

The issue in the minds of many people, Christians as well as nonChristians, is one of power, and it is painfully clear that those in the forefront of the evangelistic task are all too willing to use worldly power as a means of preaching the Gospel. Every secular means will have been exploited to ensure exposure and acceptance of the evangelist and his message. The social structure will have been broken down into its homogeneous units and staff persons assigned to penetrate these units for maximum exposure. The purpose is to proclaim the Gospel there, or to establish contacts suitable for prayer cells on an ongoing basis. The strategy of penetration is sophisticated and, by now, quite effective since there are hundreds of Christians scattered throughout the social structure from top to bottom—people in high places who know other people in high places, and the beat goes on.

The problem is not the strategy nor, probably, the motivation. It is really a problem of theology and of the captivity of the churches to class structures. There can be no doubt that the Church preaches the Gospel in a world increasingly divided between the few who have and the many who have not. Those who have are the "un-young, the un-coloured, the un-poor" of the world. And yet it is from this Gospel-haunted culture that most of the evangelistic energy has come—in middle-class garb, conservative and supportive of the status quo. It has sided, with nauseating consistency, with those agencies whose policies and practices tend toward more and more oppression. The problem is theological and reveals a tragic misinformation concerning both God and his people.

In his fine volume on mission, Dr. Johannes Verkuyl asserts that the fundamental difference between the God of Israel and the gods of the nations was that Jehovah really cared about the total needs of his people. According to Verkuyl:

The study of the environment in which the Old Testament was written, and the comparison of the living God of Israel with the Baalim of the neighbours of Israel throws ever clearer light

on what makes Israel's God and faith in Him, truly unique. The Baalim, nature-gods, were the gods of the status quo. Jahweh is the God of the exodus, the God of liberation.<sup>1</sup>

This view of God is basic to any valid evangelism. God clearly intends that his people be free and this freedom must extend toward heaven and toward earth. Recall the sacred eulogy of the old man Zechariah as he celebrates the deliverance of God for his people:

... for he has visited and redeemed his people, ... that we should be saved from our enemies,  
... that ... being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in  
holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

And then speaking of the coming day-spring from on high, the old man exclaimed, who "will guide our feet into the way of peace". Neither holiness before God nor the way of peace can be seen as merely personal or individual expressions of right standing with God. They are profoundly, if not fundamentally, political as well. Jesus' announcement of the "time" and the in-coming of the kingdom of God was not an attempt to be "relevant".<sup>2</sup> Rather it was the divine initiative in time and in history to offer a radical alternative to the oppression of the times. This emphasis on the kingdom is but a continuation of the divine intention revealed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and through them to the nation ([Luke 2:29-38](#)). Clearly God is committed to his people, but his people are the vehicle through which he brings his salvation to the nations. Of great significance here is the realization that the people of God are called not only to belong to Jehovah but also to become like the God to whom they belong. Bruce is correct in asserting that "those who render allegiance to the Kingdom of God, the disciples of Jesus, are true children of this heavenly Father, and manifest this by reproducing his character."<sup>3</sup> Bruce sees here a clear reference to [Leviticus 11:44](#), etc., in which this principle is stated, "I am Yahweh your God ..., be holy, for I am holy."

Verkuyl is especially helpful in his understanding of the divine intention for his redeemed people:

Jahweh, the slave liberator ... makes clear what his intentions are ... He intends to form a people that will live out His mercy and righteousness, a people who may in all their human relations give concrete shape and form to God's mercy and righteousness. God intends a fellowship in which God is God and people are real people, in which God and men live together in an unbreakable covenant of righteousness and love.<sup>4</sup>

Peter picks up the same motif in his correspondence ([1 Peter 1:15-6](#)). Thus Christian character derives from the nature of God himself. So also does Christian conduct; we are to do as God does. As Jesus is sent into the world, so are his disciples—to be as he is in the world, to complete his unfinished task.

This is basic and scarcely needs elaboration. What does need much elaboration is the view of God as bringing a salvation to the nations that is freedom from all bondage without and within, a liberation which is grounded in the holiness of God, a fulfilment of the prayer

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Verkuyl and H. G. Schulte Nordholt, *Responsible Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> See F. F. Bruce, *The Time is Fulfilled* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp.15–20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>4</sup> Verkuyl, p.13.

of our Lord, “thy kingdom come on earth, thy will be done, on earth, *as it is in heaven*.” This is the passion of our God. This should be the burden of his people, the hope of the saints.

Unfortunately this was never completely fulfilled, but a signal was sent into the world, and this intention has not been rescinded. Evangelism, however well-intentioned, which does not reflect this objective is incomplete and preaches only a partial Gospel of God. Evangelism as practised in most of the world today must re-capture this view of God which places him above the times in all his majesty and power, and yet *in* the times in weakness and suffering love. This twin vision must be retained for without it the Church will perpetuate the tragedy of a polarization left and right—of a false conservatism on the one hand and a false revolutionism on the other.<sup>5</sup>

Such a discovery will prove risky. It will result in the very situation Robert McAfee Brown promised in his address at Nairobi, i.e., a division among the people of God. It must needs happen for the whole truth is not to be found at the ends of the poles and only a clear call to repentance can bring the Church to an experience of the power of the kingdom. Here we must listen again to the Apostle ([Rom. 14:17ff](#)). The issue among us may not be food and drink previously offered to idols, but it surely is the flesh, and in this writer’s judgment the current threat is the temptation to indulge the flesh at the table of Caesar in order to win a hearing for the Gospel. The danger is that we shall succeed and the cost is that we shall have become totally irrelevant by means of our success. Salt which has lost its saltiness is of no value regardless of its brand name.

## POWER AND OUR CHRISTOLOGY

The question of relevance, especially in the face of mankind’s “recent” fascination with modernity, requires a further look at our Christology. Surely the Jesus of the Gospel is not committed to the religion of domed stadia and an electronic Church! Nor is he to be confused with some latter-day guerrilla jungle-saint. It seems time for the Church to make some definite conclusions regarding Jesus. It is not easy of course, but at the least the Church could decide upon his specialness to Christianity. Hans Küng is correct. It is this quite definite person, this Christ, an “irreplaceable person with a quite definite name.”<sup>6</sup> This, of course, is not all there is to the christological challenge. It is one thing for the Church to say, with Küng, that it is this Jesus—“decisive, definitive and archetypal for man’s relations with God, with his fellow man, with society”—and it is quite another thing to choose *the* Christ from all the tempting options.

Our choice must surely lie in the direction along the continuum begun in the Old Testament revelation of Jehovah as creator and deliverer. He will be personal *and* political; deeply pious yet truly human and, I suspect, graced with a sense of humour even while deeply grieved over the human condition. He will be decisive and clear about his task and about his person. He will seek not so much to be relevant to the times, but to apply himself and his message to the meaning behind the times. The world will not set his agenda, but he will be in strong solidarity with its pain and heartbreak. He may have lunch in the boardrooms but the moguls will not like what they hear. The common folk will hear him

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<sup>5</sup> I am greatly impressed with Helmut Thielicke’s handling of this dichotomy in his volume, *Theological Ethics*, Volume II (Fortress Press), “The Church and Politics”, pp.617–48. His view of the pastoral role of the Church in the world is especially pertinent.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p.126.

gladly. He will still eschew the path of violence, but his peaceful crusade will command the respect of the politicians and their militarist lackeys. And yet, they'll crucify him one way or another.

This is precisely the point. The Christ of modernity rarely does get crucified, and neither do most of his followers. When the Church is most in command of her mission task, she is carrying a cross, not brandishing a sword. She leads from weakness not from strength; she is heard to weep and confess her sins rather than to defend her past performances as standard-bearer for the strong and powerful. It is a strange thing to note that the Church's evangelists are not being executed or assassinated in the performance of their tasks. This honour is left to the little people—to the lonely priests who pitch their hammocks in the barrios, to the compassionate laymen who are snatched from the streets and who spend their days and nights in unimagined agony at the hands of public benefactors. To preach Christ today is to live Christ today and there can be little doubt that this means a new kind of decision—a choice for the oppressed against the oppressor. It is a choice for life against death, even though it must be through death that life must come. To preach Christ today is to follow the steps of the lowly Galilean through the world's Samarias and that means a choice against the well-meant counsel of the rest of the team. It is to feel again the whiplash of the "must".

## CONCLUSION

In order to preach Christ today the Church must be able to demonstrate a capacity to repent of her complicity with the world and its oppressive stratagems. The capacity for such repentance will determine the degree of her credibility to those held captive in injustice and violence. After all, without the Church's complicity—if only by its silence—such massive injustice could scarcely have spread to engulf the masses.

So in order to preach Christ with integrity the Church must also flesh out its repentance in *deeds* worthy of such contrition. It is not enough to confess with the lips. We did not talk our way into the support of injustice; we acted our way into carnal complicity. We must now act our way out. The Church must perform by publicly denouncing injustice as sin with the same fervour as it has spoken out on such issues as, for instance, pornography, Communism, and the absence of prayer in the public schools. The Church's evangelists must name names and call injustice by its rightful name—sin. It is clearly time to mix church growth with the clear call for justice; to stop pretending that we can do the former apart from the latter and still maintain the integrity of the Gospel. The evangelist must become a modern Ezekiel. He must hear Jehovah say "Behold ... your doom has come, injustice has blossomed, pride has budded. Violence has grown up into a rod of wickedness; none of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth. Neither shall there be preeminence among them." And what is it that occasioned such an outburst from God? The very stuff that headlines our daily newspapers—violence, injustice, idolatry, the exploitation of the widows and orphans by corrupt legal systems, kickbacks, extortion by the use of exorbitant interest on loans in the name of good business practice, etc., etc. "The land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence" ([Ezek. 7:10–2, 23](#) RSV). The point of all this is that God charges his people with this condition. Somehow the Church's evangelists must translate this message to the people of God in this time. Evangelism without repentance for our complicity with these bloody crimes is not good news.

To repent is also to make an announcement, to declare that a choice has been made to abandon the perquisites of privilege and to support actively the struggle of those yet in

bondage. It is to move out of our cozy homogeneous units and to identify with those issues which promise freedom. It seems to me that this is the only way the Church can validate its claim that Jesus frees and unites. The Church must be set free; the Church must be united; the Church must be born again for others.

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## The Breakthrough Counselling Centre

Philemon Yuen-Wan Choi

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*Interest in counselling is relatively new in the Chinese church. According to Dr. Choi, up to six or seven years ago, Bible colleges and seminaries offered no courses in pastoral counselling. Literature on the subject, apart from translations from English, has been in short supply. A 1978 survey of pastors in Hong Kong revealed that the majority spend 50–70 per cent of their time in administrative duties, while spending only 10–20 per cent of their time in counselling. While this is in part due to a disproportionately heavy work load, 70 per cent of the pastors surveyed felt they did not have sufficient training for a counselling ministry. But there are signs that the picture is changing. In Taiwan, Christians have established telephone counselling, family counselling and youth counselling services for the community. In 1976, C. Y. Kau, a seminary professor of practical theology, wrote An Introduction to Pastoral Counselling (Taiwan: China Evangelical Seminary, 1976) in Chinese. In Hong Kong, which Dr. Choi says still lags behind Taiwan in the area of counselling, the Fellowship of Evangelical Students established the Breakthrough Counselling Centre in 1975 as a form of outreach. The following is a description of the Centre by Dr. Choi, its current director and director of Breakthrough Magazine. It is the second half of his booklet, Counselling—A New Frontier in Asia, available as No. 24 of the Asian Perspective Series from Asia Theological Association, P.O. Box 73–119 Shihlin, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC 111.*

(Editor)

Most Christians are aware of counselling as a ministry within the Church, but few have considered the possibility of using counselling as a means of outreach. Recently, this idea has become acceptable to the Christians in North America. In a survey, a substantial majority of evangelical Christians, both pastors (90 per cent) and laymen (80 per cent), believe that providing (or supporting) professional counselling would be a visible ministry of their church.<sup>1</sup> In Asia, this concept is still in the experimental stage. The Breakthrough Counselling

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<sup>1</sup> King, R. R. Jr. "Evangelical Christians and Professional Counselling: A Conflict of Values?", *Journal of Psychology*, Fall 1978, 6(4), p.279.

Centre in Hong Kong is an example of one attempt by the Church to reach out to the surrounding society through counselling.

## BRIEF HISTORY

The “Breakthrough Ministries” was started in 1974 under the umbrella of the Fellowship of Evangelical Students (Hong Kong). It began as an evangelistic magazine (*Breakthrough Magazine*), aimed at the youth in Hong Kong. Now the scope of Breakthrough Ministries includes the publication of two magazines (*Breakthrough*, circulation 35,000; *Breakthrough Junior*, circulation 16,000); the operation of two counselling centres; the production of a 1–1 1/2 hour programme five evenings per week on a local commercial radio station; and the production of evangelistic slide and film shows.

The Breakthrough counselling ministry started off as a means of following up the magazine readers. The counselling service was advertized through the magazine, through the radio programme, and subsequently by means of a “hot line service” and personal interviews. Over the past five years, counsellor clientele has expanded to include not only the magazine readers and the radio programme audience, but also the referrals from churches, Christian organizations and other social agencies. Now the two counselling centres, with ten full-time staff and over forty regular volunteer counsellors are touching people from all walks of life.

## BASIC PHILOSOPHIES AND THEIR APPLICATION

*1. Wholistic care.* We believe that the Lord has called us to care for people: for their physical, intellectual, and emotional, as well as spiritual needs.

While most secular counsellors make no attempt to explore, not to mention fulfil, man’s spiritual needs, we make no apologies for integrating evangelism and counselling. Due to the evangelistic impact of the magazine and radio programme, a good proportion of the counsellees (approx. 15 per cent) who seek our help take the initiative to reveal their spiritual needs. We apply scriptural principles and utilize spiritual resources to help our counsellees face their spiritual problems.

However, we do not preach to everyone who comes our way. There are those who seek help for emotional disturbances, and we start where they are, working with their felt needs. Eventually, we may bring some of them to an awareness of their spiritual needs, but we do not turn the counselling service into a purely evangelistic service.

*2. Multi-faceted service.* We attempt to cover the following dimensions of counselling in our service: remedial, preventive, and developmental.

*Remedial* counselling is offered by means of correspondence, radio programmes, telephone service, and personal interviews. At present, we handle approximately 300 counselling cases per month: roughly 65 per cent by interview, 25 per cent by telephone, 10 per cent by correspondence. The counsellees approach us with a wide variety of problems, covering areas such as friendship, love affairs, family relationships, study problems, career and religious issues. There are those who present serious psychiatric problems, requiring referral to psychiatrists. We also enlist the help of other social work agencies to offer help in solving social problems (e.g. housing, finances).

The majority of our counsellees fall into the age group of 18–22 since these young people belong to the target audience of our magazine and radio programme. Gradually, over



the years, we have begun to help more counselees over 22 years of age as we receive more referral cases from pastors, Christian workers, social workers and teachers.

Approximately half of our counselees are Christians and the other half non-Christians. Therefore, we are in a good position to get in touch with non-Christians in their times of crisis. It also indicates clearly that Christians are not exempt from psychological disturbances. We are encouraged by the fact that more Christians have gathered enough courage to seek counselling help, particularly in a culture which cares so much about “losing face”.

As we recruit more full-time counsellors, we continue to put more effort into launching *preventive* counselling programmes. The common format of a preventive programme includes lectures and workshops conducted in schools and churches. Occasionally we conduct large scale public seminars. In 1978, a seminar on “Spiritual and Emotional Balance” was attended by over 800 people. In 1979, a seminar on “Crisis Intervention” drew over 600 participants; and another workshop on “Interpersonal Relationships” attracted an audience of over 800.

Several times a year, the magazine publishes special issues related to preventive counselling: such as “emotional crises,” “understanding yourself,” “dating and courtship,” “sex education,” “interpersonal communication”. In the magazine, there is a regular column devoted to answering personal problems raised by the readers. These columns and issues related to counselling have been enthusiastically received by the public.

The radio programme also allocates a regular slot for answering the audience’s personal problems on the air. In addition there are occasional special programmes which deal with issues related to counselling.

The counselling staff are co-operating with their co-workers in the publication department and audiovisual department in the production of books, pamphlets and slide shows dealing with relevant issues that the young people are facing today. The first in a series will be a set of material on the theme of “interpersonal relationships”.

In offering *development* counselling we want to educate the public to know that counselling is not designed exclusively for the psychologically disturbed. Everybody in their developmental process will encounter crises which they have to learn to cope with and overcome. To promote the concept of growth, we have organized “growth groups” for “normal” people—e.g. encounter groups for our volunteer counsellors; growth groups for married couples or engaged couples; groups for developing social skills.

In order to facilitate personal growth, our volunteer counsellor trainees are required to receive a minimum of four sessions of personal counselling. The staff counsellors also meet regularly to help one another in personal growth, and they act as counsellors for one another.

**3. Multi-media approach.** We acknowledge the power of the mass media; yet, to be effective in bringing behavioural change, mass communication should be coupled with interpersonal communication.

The Breakthrough Ministries utilizes the multi-media approach in its attempt to reach young people. Mass media is used as a means of “pre-evangelism,” preparing the soil for the seed of the Gospel. We do not rely on the mass media for personal conversion. We try to encourage Christians to do personal follow-up, at the same time we organize Gospel camps and evangelistic Bible study groups for our readers as means of direct evangelism.

The counselling ministry also serves the purpose of being a means of follow-up for the magazine and radio ministries. At the same time, these media are used as tools for launching

preventive counselling programmes. The audiovisual department is laying ground work for the utilization of other media such as films, television, and video-cassettes.

*4. Multi-level mobilization.* We believe that the effectiveness of a ministry would become very hampered if it were monopolized by only a few experts. Therefore, we also endeavour to mobilize and train lay people at various levels.

We do not undermine the importance of specialists, but we do not confine the task of counselling to a few experts. Among our eight fulltime professional counsellors, two hold doctoral degrees in counselling, one has a doctorate in medicine, two have special training in social work, the others have obtained a master's-level training in counselling. In addition to their counselling service the full-time staff are responsible for training volunteer, para-professional counsellors. After an intensive training programme, the volunteers begin their service under the supervision of the full-time counsellors. These training courses are conducted every six months, producing approximately 40 para-professional counsellors each term.

We also attempt to mobilize the peer groups of our counselees in order to offer them fuller support and "peer-counselling". They also participate in our growth groups.

Recently, we have set up special training programmes for teachers, pastors and seminary students, since these people are in excellent positions to offer counselling help to a large population both inside and outside of the Church. A special eight-week training course for teachers was attended by 40 teachers, and a workshop for teachers had 120 participants. The seminars and workshops for pastors and seminary students were also very well accepted.

The Lord has also opened the way for us to enter Bible colleges and seminaries. Several of our staff were invited to conduct either regular courses or TEE courses on counselling. This is a sign that the counselling ministry is gaining more acceptance from theological educators.

To build up an effective and extensive Christian counselling network in and out of the Church, we need to train and mobilize people at all levels: professional, para-professional, and even nonprofessional (peer counselling).

*5. Christian social concern.* We are convinced that the proclamation of the Gospel should be accompanied by Christian action. By God's grace, we strive to function as the Church's arm, extended into the society.

Christian influence should not be confined within the four walls of the Church; rather, the impact should be felt in every stratum of society.

By virtue of their profession, counsellors inevitably exert a direct influence on their counselees, and indirectly make their impact felt on the society through their lectures and writings. Sigmund Freud, one of the founding fathers of modern psychiatry, is still considered an influential figure in relation to the life pattern of the modern man. The worldview and value system of the counsellor is reflected in the effect he has on others. Unfortunately, several key figures in the counselling field were rather unsympathetic towards religion, and some of them even attacked Christianity openly.<sup>2</sup> Christians should be more involved in the field of counselling, not merely in hopes of helping the counselees, but also in trying to inject a Christian influence into the profession.

By virtue of the remedial service and preventive programmes we offer, the Breakthrough Counselling Centre is gradually making its influence felt in society. Even within social work

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<sup>2</sup> Freud, S., *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Norton, 1961); Skinner, B. F., *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

and counselling circles, we are recognized as a group of professional counsellors who hold firmly to our Christian standards. We make no attempt to hide our Christian values in front of our counselees. We make no apologies for our Christian viewpoint during encounters with other professionals. By our involvement in the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the Hong Kong Psychological Society, and the Association of Psychological and Educational Counsellors of Asia, we wish to have an input in the shaping of the trends, ethical standards and the professional quality of counselling in Hong Kong.

Counselling serves as an excellent contact point between the Church and the society. We desire to be used by the Lord at this strategic point: serving the Church on one hand and at the same time exerting an influence on the society.

## SEVERAL BURNING ISSUES

The Breakthrough Counselling Centre faces tremendous challenges from all directions. Reassured by the Lord's presence, we are grappling with several burning issues.

*1. Integration of psychology and theology.* Since most secular psychologists have built their theories on a naturalistic presupposition, it is absolutely essential to rebuild psychology on a new foundation.<sup>3</sup> The most basic premise is the recognition that God exists and that He communicates with man by various means—natural revelation, revelation through the prophets and His own Son Jesus Christ; and special revelation through the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God and the behavioural sciences should be put under the authority of Scripture. This implies that when the teaching of Scripture conflicts with any other idea, the teaching of Scripture will be accepted as truth.

This is not to say that outside of Scripture there are no resources for building a counselling theory. I believe that other disciplines also contribute to the understanding of human behaviour and its modification. One should not ignore other disciplines such as theology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, the arts and even the physical sciences. However, information gathered from these sources should be tested against the truths revealed to us through the Scriptures.

The integration of psychology and theology is still at the infancy stage. As more progress is made in this area, it will shed more light on approaches to counselling.

*2. Blending of counselling and culture.* Christianity is rejected by some Asians because of its "western package". Counselling may receive the same treatment unless it is adapted and presented in a form which is meaningful and relevant to each particular culture.

Although counselling is much better developed in the West, the burden to cross the culture gap should not lie on the Christians in the western world alone. Efforts should come from both sides of the cultural gap. The Christian in a non-western culture has to make an effort to meet the challenge, and this would require crossing the culture to draw from the resources available in the West, and then adapting what he has learned to his own culture. Winter pointed out that E<sup>1</sup> evangelism is more effective than E<sup>2</sup> and E<sup>3</sup> evangelism.<sup>4</sup> Other

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<sup>3</sup> Collins, G. R., *The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration of Psychology and Christianity* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1977), pp.137–152. The author proposes a new foundation for the rebuilding of psychology.

<sup>4</sup> Winter, R. D., "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism". In G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky (eds.), *Mission Trend No. 2: Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

researchers also agree that counsellors from a different culture are usually less effective as a direct deliverer of service.

While a major part of the effort should come ideally from the people in the non-western culture, the counsellors in the western culture also have a significant role to play. In an attempt to tackle the question “can we export western psychotherapy to non-western cultures?”, Wohl has the following suggestion:

This means that the occasional westerner engaging in intercultural therapy is at best doing therapy to learn the culture so that he can better do research or perform training and consultive functions for the direct delivery of service.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the complexity of each individual culture, it would be most practical for a counsellor from a different culture to work in an area of research, training or consultation rather than direct service.

With efforts from both sides, the task of crossing the cultural gap would be made much easier. This would help to promote the development of counselling in Asian cultures, and at the same time stimulate growth in the field of cross-cultural counselling.

The present author has adapted a peer counsellor training programme to the Chinese, making cultural modifications in the adapted version.<sup>6</sup> The quarterly *Counselling Bulletin* published by the Breakthrough Counselling Centre also attempts to bring counselling and the local culture closer together. More efforts will be made along this line in the future.

*3. Establishment of link with the local church.* In order to serve the church more effectively, there needs to be good communication, mutual understanding, and close co-operation. Right from the beginning, we work side by side with the local church. The first counselling centre was founded in one of the low-cost housing estates in Hong Kong (Oi Man Estate), by means of joint effort with a Christian and Missionary Alliance church. A second counselling centre was started in co-operation with a Baptist church, which had a vision of reaching out into their local community (Shum Shui Po District, Kowloon). We thank the Lord for this close working relationship with the local church. We are making an effort to build a model by which a local church can effectively penetrate its neighbouring community by means of a counselling service. This model is still in the experimental stage.

For other local churches which are not so closely linked to us, we function as a referral centre and a training centre. In return, we depend on their prayers and financial support.

*4. Co-operation with seminaries.* During the Asian Leadership Conference on Evangelism, Dr. Philip Teng commented: “Asian Christians are not known for their co-operative spirit that has gradually been built up over the past few years among the churches in Hong Kong. The theological educators are working hard to improve their co-operation; the Asia Theological Association and the Association for Promotion of Chinese Theological Education have made significant contributions in this area. We are praying for a major breakthrough in the area of counselling training. The Breakthrough Counselling Centre and the local Bible colleges and seminaries are joining hands in the planning of a joint counselling training programme. The

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<sup>5</sup> Wohl, J., “Intercultural Psychotherapy: Issues, Questions, and Reflections”. In P. Pedersen, W. J. Lonner, and J. G. Draguns (eds.), *Counselling Across Cultures* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976), pp.184–207.

<sup>6</sup> Collins, G. R., *How to be a People Helper* and *People Helper Growth Book and People Helper Training Cassettes* (Santa Ana, California: Vision House, 1976). The Chinese version is published by Christian Witness Press, Hong Kong, 1978.

Lord willing, there may emerge a comprehensive training programme offering a master's degree in Christian counselling. There is a long way to go, and we welcome input from Christian counsellors and theological educators in other Asian countries.

## CONCLUSION

The Asian scene is rapidly changing. China with the greatest population is concentrating her effort on "modernization"; similar trends are obvious in other developing countries. As a by-product of modernization, the increase in demand for counselling is predictable. Counselling is rapidly becoming a new frontier for the Asian Church. Christians who are concerned about theological education, church growth, pastoral care, evangelism and social concern should attempt to contribute to the advancement of the field of Christian counselling. In response to the challenge, some initial efforts are being made in certain Asian countries. To enable greater strides forward, there needs to be more awareness of the demands; more willingness to devote time, money, energy and talents; more openness to cooperate at a local as well as pan-Asian level.

"Lord, give us mountains,  
and the courage to climb!"

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# The New Gospel of Community

Derek Tidball

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The idea that Christians ought to live in communities is currently receiving much attention. For some Christians, community living seems to have become the new gospel which they are zealously preaching as the answer to man's personal problems. Other Christians are almost as zealously opposed to the idea and propagate scare stories about the supposed harmful effects of community living. In spite of the topicality and importance of the subject, little real awareness of issues seems evident among Christians.

The current emphasis on communities amongst evangelical Christians stems from three recent movements. The briefest such movement was the Jesus movement of the 1960s and early 1970s whose communes reflected the secular communes of their generation. They were designed to insulate the Jesus converts from the contaminated world around them and to provide a controlled lifestyle for them which relied on strong leadership. Some of these communes were transitory and others developed in a disturbing way. Ronald Enroth has recorded the sad story in *Youth Brainwashing and the Extremist Cults* (Paternoster, 1977). It is the fear of the repetition of these experiences that causes some Christians to react negatively towards the idea of community living.

More significantly, the desire for community living stems from the charismatic movement. The most publicized example of a community which came into existence as a result of a church experiencing charismatic renewal is that of the Church of the Redeemer, Houston, Texas. Its story has been told by Michael Harper in *A New Way of Living* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1973) and retold by its Rector, Graham Pulkingham in *They Left Their Nets* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974). Several other communities have been encouraged to start as a result of this one church alone.

The third strand in the emphasis on community living is to be found among the advocates of 'radical discipleship' who have received increasing attention since the Lausanne Congress in 1974 which provided them with a world-wide platform. The idea of community living is not always explicitly spelled out as the final chapter of Jim Wallis' *Agenda for Biblical People* (Harper and Row, 1976) shows. Occasionally it is explicitly cold-shouldered as in Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (p.91). But even so the idea is present and implicit in much of what is written. The basic proposition of the group is that Jesus came to found a community which would live in an alternative way to the generally accepted way of society. According to John Howard Yoder such a community would be 'a visible structured fellowship' where members had consciously accepted the costs of commitment and were defined by a distinct lifestyle with the object of changing the world (*The Politics of Jesus*). These last two streams often converge to produce the practice of community living such as that which has been adopted by some at St. Michael-le-Belfry, York. David Watson has made this plain in his book *I Believe in the Church* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1978).

## COMMUNITIES IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The arguments used by those who advocate such community living are numerous. Some communities emphasize some arguments more than others but they usually fall into two groups: biblical and/or pragmatic.

The biblical arguments are numerous but even in combination are not impressive. They centre on the teaching of Jesus and the practice of the early Church. Jesus is said to demand of his disciples that they forsake all personal ambition, private property and the things of this world, even one's family, in order to follow him in the new community of the kingdom. Clearly Jesus did make radical claims which may be seen in that way ([Mark 3:31–35](#); [6:7–13](#); [Luke 5:11, 27–28](#); [18:18–30](#), etc.). But a literal interpretation of his words was not applied even by Jesus himself to *all* his disciples. Peter may have kept his boat and was able to go back to it after the crucifixion. Jesus continued to care for his mother even at the moment of his death. He was glad to use the house of Lazarus and his sisters at Bethany and nowhere seems to have treated them as second-class citizens of the kingdom.

Each person who wants to follow Jesus has to face a crux decision, a particular issue, if he is to make Jesus his lord. For the rich young ruler of [Luke 18:18–30](#) it was the question of possessions and consequently Jesus demanded an absolute commitment *from him* in that area of his life. For others the absolute demand of Jesus was expressed differently. They had different idols and were different people and so faced different crux decisions.

It has been suggested by Dick France in his excellent article on the teaching of Jesus on wealth (*Third Way*, 18 May 1978) that there may well have been a two-tier system of discipleship, the distinction being between those who were itinerant with Jesus on a full-time basis and other supporters who remained in their jobs and home. Gerd Theissen in his sociological examination of the Gospels, *The First Followers of Jesus* (SCM, 1978), also supports this suggestion. The idea of two tiers may be misleading—implying that one was

superior to the other. Jesus needed, used and accepted both forms of discipleship. But the demands and functions of those who were itinerant were obviously different from those who remained settled. The demands of the first should not be universalized for Jesus did not do so, even though those in the second group should be confronted with them. Maybe this is the right principle to apply today. All should face up to the issues but those who accept the way of community will be a minority. They will not enjoy inherent spiritual superiority because they have done so.

Apart from the Gospels, the most frequently quoted argument for community living comes from the community of goods practised by the Jerusalem church ([Acts 2:44–45](#); [4:32–37](#)). But again the argument that we should return to this pattern of living, because this is how the Church lived when closest to Pentecost, is far from straightforward. Luke makes clear that the practice was entirely voluntary ([Acts 5:4](#)) and many influential people in the primitive Church obviously did not dispose of their property (e.g., Mary the mother of John, [Acts 12:12](#)). The last reference to their primitive communism occurs in [Acts 6:1–6](#) when the Church was experiencing difficulties because of it and it is neither spoken of nor recommended subsequently. The rest of the New Testament emphasizes that the Church exists by the voluntary but generous giving of its members out of their possessions ([1 Cor. 16:1](#); [2 Cor. 8](#) and [9](#)).

Some have argued that the pooling of resources in this way led to poverty later on in the church at Jerusalem. But such was probably not the case. The city of Jerusalem was not viable as an economic entity and had to be supported by the gifts of faithful Jews who lived elsewhere. The Jerusalem church, which had a large number of apostles and widows dependent on it, was no exception to that economic fact. And the practice of community living was obviously no remedy.

An even weaker argument used by some younger members of community is that the early Church adopted a household structure which they believe they are copying today. But to argue this is to totally misunderstand the meaning of the ‘church in your own home’ referred to in [1 Cor. 16:9](#), [Philemon 2](#), etc. The household was not a specifically Christian invention but a normal Roman social structure. It consisted of a principal family and a number of dependent families of all social statuses who would live on or near the same property but not as a single family. The members of the household would all usually be engaged in a common commercial or agricultural venture or supporting the estate of the chief family in the household. The evangelistic mission of the Church used this structure to great effect. Many groups of believers met in what must have been the relatively wealthy property of the householders for worship. But in no way does it compare with the contemporary idea of community. Nor was it a spiritual invention on the part of the Church aimed at expressing the essence of the Gospel through a new or alternative social structure.

Far from discovering direct evidence of or arguments for communities in the New Testament it would seem that the real roots of community living must lie elsewhere. Contemporary communities have much more in common with the Essene community at Qumran than with the practice of the New Testament Church. Basing their common life on [Isaiah 40:3](#) this closely-knit group of volunteers prepared for the coming of the ‘righteous one’. They numbered a few hundred; were organized hierarchically; had a strict system of discipline; gave up all private property after a suitable period of initiation and probably practised celibacy. Their monastic existence was very different from the common life of the New Testament Church.

## PRAGMATIC ARGUMENTS

Pragmatic arguments for community living are more convincing. They largely stem from some of the problems created by our western society and show how community living can be one solution to these problems both for the individuals concerned and for the Church. They focus on two issues: relationships and resources.

Contemporary western society faces a crisis of relationships. It is seen directly in terms of the divorce and separation rate; it is felt by many in terms of the generation gap and it is visible in the rising number of one-parent families who are doomed to a struggling existence. Less obvious but equally real is what this breakdown is doing to the next generation. Many who have grown up unwanted or uncared for and who have learned that family life is not the bliss which was once imagined find it difficult to make satisfactory relationships themselves. They are often introspective or bitter and they prefer isolation to any significant integration with others. The community concept provides them with one opportunity to belong without making the total commitment of marriage.

This is not to underrate the painful process which is often involved in living in community. Nonetheless it is in such a context that isolated people can sometimes learn self-acceptance, discover themselves and progress to maturity.

Communities not only care for the casualties of our disintegrating society but for those who have deliberately chosen for one reason or another to remain single. David Watson argues that community living is healthier for the nuclear family as well. With some justification he argues that the extended family rather than the isolated family has been a better norm in history and that it was the norm in the time of the New Testament. An excessively exclusive marriage relationship is not only selfish and therefore sinful but destructive to the couple involved.

The argument from resources stems from the fact that both the world and the Church are suffering from diminishing resources. Since two can live as cheaply as one, it is said that living in community uses the scarce resources of the world more responsibly. Community living also challenges the wasteful and greedy materialism of the mass of the population and serves as an example of an alternative and satisfying way of living. As far as the Church goes it too is finding it difficult to make ends meet and to employ as many full-time workers as it used to do. But living in community and so pooling resources releases both finance and personnel for the work of the Church. It also enables some adventurous forms of ministry or mission to the wider community which would not otherwise be possible.

These pragmatic arguments deserve the attention of every thinking Christian. Since they touch on issues which are crucial for the survival of the society in which we live, they can encourage us to demonstrate a relevant and potent discipleship within that society. But even so, living in community is not the only answer to the problems mentioned and one must respect a fellow believer who chooses an alternative solution.

## **SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The reasons given by the proponents of community living for its advocacy must be taken seriously in their own right. However if the current quest for community is to be understood the picture needs to be painted on a much broader canvas than the advocates would themselves choose. Primary justification for community living, as far as its advocates go, is to be found in Scripture and secondary justification is to be found in practice. They often see themselves as more committed to God, less contaminated by the world and in some cases as a clear and visible outpost of the kingdom of God, often with eschatological overtones. But



they show little awareness of the whole diverse phenomenon of community living. It may be that its explanation lies more in a sociological than theological direction.

The quest for community is neither confined to this age nor to groups of believers in Jesus Christ. At least from the time of the Essenes onwards history is littered with examples of community experiments. Other communities have included the Diggers of the seventeenth century; the Anabaptists; Robert Owen and his experiment in Lanarkshire; and the Mennonites. Contemporary groups include the kibbutz in Israel, the Amish, the Hutterites and a wide range of political groups of one sort or another. Many last only a brief period although Christian communities seem to have a better success record, if the test is longevity, than secular communities. It has been estimated that the average length of life for a religious community is fifty years whereas for others it is only five years.

A few communities have suffered the fate of Qumran and been attacked and destroyed. Others have ended in awful tragedy such as the recent sad example of Jonestown. But most just cease to exist. Usually their members drift or fail to agree on objectives and lifestyles and so part company. Survival often depends on adaptability. The history of the Bruderhof as outlined by J. M. Whitworth in *God's Blueprints* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) is a good example of this. It was founded by Eberhard Arnold in 1920 and drew much from the experience of the Hutterites. It was originally formed as a reaction to German bourgeois life and sought to re-establish older patterns of folk and rural life, and it saw itself as a demonstration of the kingdom of God on earth. Today it exists in the form of three pacifist communities in the USA consisting of almost 9,000 people. But its survival has only been possible because over time it has adapted to different locations, different generations, different goals and different patterns of evangelism and isolation. The adaptations have not always been easy, as the 'purifications' of 1958 and 1962, which resulted in the closure of all but the US houses, demonstrated.

After studying three different religious communities Whitworth concluded that they emerged 'when value patterns and institutions were in flux, or being subjected to intensive critical scrutiny'. He further concluded that the enthusiasm for community 'is especially marked in those societies or areas of societies in which life is to a particularly high degree impersonal, anonymous and outwardly demystified and in which human relationships are largely impermanent and conducted within a framework of specific rules'. Both conclusions aptly describe our own society.

Andrew Rigby has studied contemporary communities on a wide scale and published his research in an important work called *Alternative Realities* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974). Though his main interest was in political communes, and his chapter on religious communes is weak, he has much to say which is relevant for our understanding of the desire for communities in evangelicalism. Religious communities are a particular application of his general thesis about why people join communities. Communities are formed, he argues, because conditions are unsettled and a potential recruit is dissatisfied with his present style of life. In the community the recruit hopes to discover a different way of living—an alternative reality to that generally accepted within society.

Using Goffman's concept of career, Rigby traces the steps by which a potential recruit joins a community. Step 1 is dissatisfaction with life in general. Step 2 is an awareness of the existence of communes. Step 3 is some sort of acquaintance with a community or its members, e.g. a weekend visit, which suggests that they may be the answer he is looking for. Step 4 is the discovery of a suitable community and the initial stages of contact with it. Step 5 demands that the potential recruit defines his situation and existing ties as sufficiently free to drop out and join the alternative reality.

The way in which Rigby expounds the reasons for a recruit's dissatisfaction with the 'normal world' is, for our present purposes, the most significant part of his research. Recruits are mostly young people who do not so much object to particular social wrongs as to the general values and orientations on which people in the 'normal world' base their lives. Among those values are materialism; competitive individualism; the institutionalization of hypocrisy; hatred of the rat race; the pointlessness of pursuing an occupation which is not particularly enjoyable and the meaninglessness of the status symbols which the normal world invests with so much importance. As one member of a community told him, 'The alternative society means people caring about one another and sharing. In straight society they are all competing and thinking about themselves.' A community enables a person to escape from the pre-packaged process of living experienced in the 'normal world'. It enables the recruit to resist the attempts of others to label him and so discover his own identity and venture out on his own search for fulfilment.

Communities therefore not only relieve the pressures for the individuals who reject the usual social world's lifestyle but set themselves up as an example to the normal social world of how life ought to be lived. Many go even beyond that to look forward to the time their way of living becomes normal and a new world dawns. The communities may well see themselves as 'seeds of the new age'.

But if life in 'normal society' is really 'not fit for human consumption' why do not more people opt out to join communities? Those who live in communities argue that it is either because people have been fooled by the media into thinking life is better than it is and their false consciousness prevents them from seeing their real situation or because people see how bad it is but do not see the alternatives. Communitarians refuse to be fooled, have seen the options and will not settle for less than the ideal.

What makes a person join a community which is specifically religious? It may be for one of two reasons. First it may be that the community which a potential recruit experienced during stages 3 and 4 of his career was a religious community. Such community appeared to him to provide the alternative reality he was seeking in response to his dissatisfaction with the 'normal world'.

Or secondly, it may be that the recruit was not so much dissatisfied with the whole of the 'normal world' but with his experience of the church in the normal world. Many members of communities are disillusioned church members or the disillusioned second or third generation of Christian families. Their social world is very often confined by the church and its activities. Their disillusionment is not with the wider society but with what they see in the church. And what they see in the church is ironically precisely what others have rejected in the wider normal society. If in the paragraphs above, the words 'normal church' were substituted for 'normal society' or 'normal world' the cause of the disillusioned young Christian's unease would become clear. The same lack of care, personal warmth and integrity, the same concern to label and the same enjoyment of worldly prestige is often to be found within the church as well as in the world.

Ironically theologians since R. Newton Flew onwards (in *Jesus and His Church*, Epworth Press, 1938) in writing about the church have most frequently used the word 'community' to describe it. It is the 'community of the new age', 'the messianic community', 'the community of the kingdom', 'the eschatological community', etc. But equally few theologians have paid any attention to the sociological dimension of the word 'community'. The recent works of Jürgen Moltman, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (SCM, 1977) and *The Open Church* (SCM, 1978) stand as notable exceptions to this, as also do the stimulating books of Howard

Snyder, *New Wineskins* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1977) and *Community of the King* (IVP, 1977).

What is true at a theological level has often been true as well at pew level. Members of churches have confirmed the theologians' choice of words that the church is a 'community'. But the word and the reality have been different. The incongruity between word and lifestyle has resulted in dissatisfied members searching for real communities. And since their dissatisfaction is generated by religion their solution may either be to reject religion or to discover renewed religion. Like their equally dissatisfied secular counterparts the last group have sometimes found the solution by living in community. For many, no doubt this solution has proved satisfactory. For others it has only led to further disillusionment. So it is important that before jumping out of the frying pan into the fire potential members should be aware of the issues involved in community living.

### **COMMUNITIES: UTOPIAN SECTS?**

It has been customary for sociologists to deal with the phenomena of communities by describing it as a 'utopian sect'. The 'utopian sect' is described as a voluntary group who withdraw from the world because they believe it to be corrupt. Their aim is a radical reconstruction of the world and in that reconstruction they are to play a vital role. Utopian sects usually involve some communitarian structure and this is because their community is to be both the model of the new society and the means by which it is to come about. So, many evangelical sects today emphasize the doctrine of the kingdom of God and see themselves as its visible outpost in the kingdom of Satan. There is a tendency for some communities to become more and more exclusive not only from the world but from the Church. Some also become more and more dogmatic as to when and how the kingdom is to be ushered in. Such groups have a long history of disappointment and failure, for God remains true to his word and has not yet shared the date of the coming again of Jesus Christ with anyone.

This traditional sociological interpretation is no longer adequate to the contemporary phenomenon of community living among evangelical Christianity. Indeed it is doubtful if there ever have been many communities who have conformed precisely to the sociologists' model of a 'utopian sect'. Today the community rather than the sect needs to become the model for analysis. It is necessary to the understanding of the community concept that groups are seen not as distinct types of sect, widely separate from each other, but as groups which can be placed on a continuum. There is only more or less community.

Some are very exclusive and have only minimal contact with the outside world. They shun newspapers and the media; they scorn fashions and possessions and sometimes education. Their leadership is often authoritarian. And they seek to impose total control on a member's time and activities, beliefs and attitudes. These are the groups which can go sadly wrong. They are the groups which are sensationalized and which we have read about in the press. Within evangelicalism however, there are also communities which are much more open to the outside world and to normal lifestyles. Their organization is much more democratic and they are much less inclusive in the range of control they seek to exercise over their members. Nevertheless they are also communities. Such groups usually take the form of an extended family. Somewhere between the two extremes lies the form of community which is composed of a number of households situated within a small geographical area and committed to the community ideas.

Two steps need to be taken in order to prevent further trouble. The 'normal church' needs to examine itself with a view to living as a more authentic community. It also needs to examine the indisputably biblical themes which the communities have rediscovered and they for so long have neglected. The communities on their part need to examine these themes again and constantly keep themselves alert to them and to their Christian brothers to ensure that they have not and will not mistake the letter of the law for the intention and will of God.

Those who live in evangelical communities do so because they sincerely believe this lifestyle to be more biblical than that of the normal church. But the weakness of the biblical evidence supporting that claim and the anti-biblical nature which has developed as a result in the lifestyle of some communities, should make one cautious. Further, the widespread quest for community of all types, not just religious, in today's western society would suggest that unknown to the recruits other motives are really at work. Recruits to secular communities may well be reacting to the futility, hypocrisy and carelessness of secular society. Recruits to religious communities are reacting to those same features within the church. And by any standards that is a condemnation the 'normal church' must take seriously.

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# **Theological Education and Christian Education: A Theological Educator's Point of View**

**Andrew Hsiao**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In a recent Church Workers Seminar in Taipei, conducted by this speaker and attended by more than 40 pastors and evangelists, two courses were offered. One was on the doctrine of the Church, the other on Christian education. Questions were raised as to the suitability of the latter subject. Some participants hinted that since they were mainly pastors rather than Sunday school teachers, the value of the CE course was questionable.

Knowing that the attitude of the participants was crucial to the success or failure of this course, "Introduction to Christian Education", I began the class with a brain-storming session. I asked the ministers to list on the blackboard the various activities and programmes which are normally conducted each week in the local congregation. More than twenty items were suggested, including Sunday worship, Sunday school, Bible study classes, catechetical

and confirmation instruction, youth fellowship meetings, women's and men's meetings, choir rehearsal, etc.

I next asked the participants to think carefully as to how many of the activities were related to CE. To their surprise they discovered that more than 80 per cent of what they had mentioned are in the field of CE.

This finding not only greatly aroused interest in CE among this group of ministers, but at the same time also raised a serious question as to the relation between TE and CE: If the majority of activities in a church in which the minister is normally involved are educational in nature, then what should be the proper relation between Christian education and theological education, which is usually designed for the training of church ministers?

Before any attempt is made to answer this question it may be in order to take a glance at the present situation regarding the relation between TE and CE, as well as review the development of the relation between theology and Christian education in the past.

### **THE RELATION BETWEEN TE AND CE TODAY**

Theological education and Christian education are two distinctive functions or programmes of the church. As a whole, the former is chiefly designed for the training of professional churchworkers, while the latter is largely aimed at the nurture of believers. Since CE activities form a major part of the life and work of the church, as shown by the Taipei Seminar, CE has gradually been recognized by more and more theological educators as an integral part of the seminary curriculum. However, by and large, the role that CE plays in the total TE curriculum as a discipline of study is still not more than that of a handmaid.

A glance at the 1978 Directory of Theological Schools in Asia shows that only 24 out of 176 schools, or 13.6 per cent of those providing statistics (out of a possible 500 schools), offer special programmes in CE.<sup>1</sup> Four of the 24 schools offer a certificate or diploma of CE, 20 offer CE degrees on the bachelor's level and only one offers CE degrees on both the bachelor's and master's levels. To be sure, the statistics are far from complete as only 35 per cent of all the Asian theological schools have provided the information requested. But it is doubtful whether the percentage of 13.6 would be appreciably increased were the information from all 500 schools available.

If our observation mentioned above is correct that 80 per cent, or the majority of the work of the congregations is educational, then we might well question whether the Asian seminaries are meeting the special needs of CE workers in the churches today.

Again, if CE programmes constitute the major part of the life and work of the congregations, then the question is not only how many seminaries offer special programmes to train Christian educators, but how much CE training each seminary provides for the future pastors. For practical reasons, most churches in Asia today cannot rely on experts to conduct their CE programmes but depend instead mainly on instruction given by pastors. The study of CE on the part of pastors in the seminaries is therefore crucial if the Asian churches expect to have effective CE programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Asia Theological Association, 1978 Directory of Theological Schools in Asia (Taipei, Taiwan).

However, even a casual glance at the curricula of the seminaries<sup>2</sup> readily gives the impression that CE as a discipline is greatly neglected, if not totally so in many cases. Many schools offer only one or two subjects in this field, such as Sunday school teaching, children's work, theory and practice of Christian education, etc. out of a total of 60–70 subjects; others limit the number of credits to CE courses to four to six out of a total of 128–160. To be sure, there are also seminaries that have a more balanced curriculum in which the importance of CE is duly recognized. The number of these schools, however, is very small.

The reasons for neglecting CE in TE curricula in Asia today may well be many. The transplanting of curricula from the West without question is certainly a major one. Most of the theological schools in Asia were founded by missionaries from the West a number of years ago, when CE was not yet a part, certainly not an important part of teaching in the seminaries in the West, such as in the USA. Even today CE as such is still an unknown or an unimportant subject of study in many European seminaries. This is partly because in many European countries where Christianity is a state religion, the teaching of religion is usually the task of the public schools. And as such, religious teaching in many cases has gradually become synonymous with character education, and thus the training of teachers of religion is usually the responsibility of the teacher schools rather than the seminaries.

The Asian churches are different. Christianity in Asia is not a state religion. We cannot degrade CE to mere character education, nor can we rely on public schools for training Christian educators. It thus becomes mainly the responsibility of the seminaries to provide the kind of TE in which students are adequately trained to serve churches in which CE is a major part of their life and work.

The transplantation of western curricula and the educational system of the state churches can only in part explain the neglect of CE in TE in Asia and Europe. The most basic reason is, however, a philosophical and theological one which was caused by the misunderstanding and ignorance of the proper relation between theology and CE. There was a theological ignorance on the part of the Christian educators as well as an educational ignorance on the part of theologians.

A brief review of the development of the relationship between these two will not only help to explain more clearly the problems between TE and CE today, but will help to point more convincingly to their future relationship. Since CE has been more sensitive to its relations with theology than theology to its relations with CE, it is easier to review the development of the relations between the two from the point of view of CE. This development can roughly be divided into four periods.

## **WHEN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION HAD NO NEED OF THEOLOGY**

CE as it is today is usually traced back to 1780 when the Sunday school movement had its beginning. In fact the term "Sunday schools" and "CE" were regarded as almost synonymous in the nineteenth century. During the first 125 years, the central concern of this modern CE

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<sup>2</sup> In connection with the revision of curriculum of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, the writer collected a large number of catalogues from seminaries in various parts of the world.

movement was evangelism, particularly the evangelization of children. This was what James Smart called “the evangelistic period”.<sup>3</sup>

Since the main purpose of CE in this period was child evangelism, “therefore, the only thing to be done with the child was to bring every means to bear to effect a conversion, and, until such conversion took place, the child was to be regarded and treated as not yet a Christian.”<sup>4</sup>

This attitude was severely criticized and challenged by people like Horace Bushnell, who, in 1847, published a famous book, *Christian Nurture*. Bushnell stressed a great deal the importance of Christian family influence on the faith and character of a child. He argued that “the child who has grown up into the faith of a Christian home cannot be treated as though he were an unbeliever.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet all through this period and continuing into the twentieth century Christian educators were so involved in evangelism that they gave no thought to theology. Their interest was centred on telling Bible stories, teaching gospel songs, drilling “golden verses,” etc. They paid little attention to the theories of learning, educational principles or the tasks of personality development, much less to theology. They did not bother to find out what theology was all about, nor did they see any real need for theology as such in CE.

## INVOLVEMENT IN THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES

As opposition against the evangelistic type of education increased, CE was forced to undergo a significant change. The opposition was mainly an educational one, at least at the outset. The evangelistic methods in teaching were questioned, the literalistic approach to the Bible was challenged, and the disregard of educational principles in curriculum materials was criticized.

A concerted expression of this opposition was the organization of the Religious Education Association in Chicago in 1903. This was later regarded as the beginning of a new religious education movement. Strong voices were raised calling for the introduction of more intelligent methods of Bible study as well as a more educational approach to curriculum development. Christian Education at this point entered what can be called a “religious education period,”<sup>6</sup> or simply an educational period. What followed was an unusual enthusiasm in adopting educational theories, psychological principles, social concerns, etc. into CE. It is understandable that the name “religious” was preferred to that of “Christian” during this time.<sup>7</sup>

Though the various forces that gathered at Chicago in 1903 and launched the new movement “were united more by their consciousness of the inadequacy of the Sunday School and their desire for a new day in religious education than by their adherence to any

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<sup>3</sup> James D. Smart, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p.61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, also cf. Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1947), p.31.

<sup>6</sup> James Smart, *op. cit.*, p.62.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

theological point of view," CE was nevertheless dragged into severe theological controversies from that time on. Just as "the membership in the churches became ever more sharply divided between liberals and conversionists, who were eventually to call each other modernists and fundamentalists,"<sup>8</sup> so were also the Christian educators.

But Christian educators as a whole at that time were not ready for much intelligent theological dialogue. Some of them were basically evangelists while others were largely educationalists. Very few Christian educators at that time had a good grip on theology and fewer still were able to deal with CE theologically. The result was that they were tossed about by the theological controversies raging between the modernists and fundamentalists, without being able to formulate a theological position of their own.

Some Christian educators, mainly liberals, such as George A. Coe and Ernest Chave, did try to introduce a theological foundation for CE. But their effort did not succeed mainly because their theology was more humanistic than biblical and was therefore "unworthy of consideration".<sup>9</sup> Their failure in theology, however, did not annul the great contributions they had made in education, such as upgrading the Sunday school from a chiefly evangelistic campaign to an educational movement.

### **WHEN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TOOK THEOLOGY AS A 'CLUE'**

The change that took place in Christian education in the first half of this century was both encouraging and discouraging. The introduction of educational principles and insights, for example, helped to bring CE to the level of "education". The moving away from evangelistic purposes and practices, however, is in part responsible for the deterioration from Christian education to "religious education" and at times to mere "education".

This deterioration alarmed Christian educators. Questions were raised: What has gone wrong with CE? How can CE be truly Christian and at the same time really educational? What should be done to reform CE today?

Various answers were suggested and various efforts were made at the close of the first half of this century. The most significant and most convincing answer, however, came from Randolph C. Miller in 1950 when he published *The Clue to Christian Education*. This book aroused so much interest among Christian educators that the year 1950 was later regarded by some as the beginning of another period, the period of "theological recovery," as James Smart called it.<sup>10</sup>

Miller believed that the "clue" to the solution of the problems in CE was theology. He said, "that with this clue I could open the doors of the associated questions of methods, evangelism, and parent cooperation."<sup>11</sup> He further stated, "The major task of Christian education today is to discover and impart the relevance of Christian truth. The one missing

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph Cramp Miller, *The Clue to Christian Education* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p.viii.



topic in most educational schemes today is *theology*, and in theology properly interpreted lies the answer to most of the pressing educational problems of the day.”<sup>12</sup>

In order to avoid misunderstanding, Miller explained that “this is not a plea to return to a content-centered curriculum ... it is not a desire to return to indoctrination,” nor is theology at the centre of the CE curriculum. “The center of the curriculum is a two-fold relationship between God and the learner. The curriculum is both God-centered and experience-centered.”<sup>13</sup> But he insisted “theology must be prior to the curriculum,”<sup>14</sup> and “theology, which is truth from a Christian perspective, must be the presupposition of any curriculum.”<sup>15</sup>

At the end of the first chapter of this book, Miller summarized his ideas in a one-sentence statement: “The clue to Christian education is the rediscovery of a relevant theology which will bridge the gap between content and method, providing the background and perspective of Christian truth by which the best methods and content will be used as tools to bring the learners into the right relationship with the living God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, using the guidance of parents and the fellowship of life in the Church as the environment in which Christian nurture will take place.”<sup>16</sup>

Miller’s slogan or battle-cry—the clue to CE is theology—was met with great enthusiasm and it did bring increasing consensus into the educational work of the church. By the middle of the 1960s when Howard Grimes wrote an article, “Theological Foundations for Christian Education,” he said, “the struggle for the recognition of the crucial nature of theology in relation to Christian teaching has probably won.”<sup>17</sup> By way of review Grimes then stated, “Perhaps we have also to some extent recovered a relevant theology as the *content of what is taught*. We have made considerable progress in relating theology to the *process of teaching*.” But he quickly admitted, “We have done much less with regard to *theology and methodology*. Here is one of the relatively unexplored areas of the church’s teaching ministry.”<sup>18</sup>

With theology as the clue, CE made progress and enjoyed stability in the 1950s and 1960s.

## NEW RELATIONS WITH THEOLOGY

Though the struggle for the recognition of theology as the clue in relation to CE was won, the victory was short-lived. Theology which became the dominant discipline that influenced

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> Howard Grimes, “Theological Foundations for Christian Education,” in Marvin Taylor (ed.), *Introduction to Christian Education*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p.39.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

CE in the 1950s and 1960s was, in the words of Sara Little, “no longer the clue” by the 1970s. “General educational philosophy and practice were again ‘respectable’.”<sup>19</sup>

This shift was chiefly caused, according to Little, by the “turbulent sixties,” when many unusual events took place, such as the assassinations of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the rise of the “death of God” movement, the holding of Vatican II, etc. These and other events not only caused fundamental shifts in moral and religious attitudes in the West but also engendered serious doubts among some Christian educators about the dominant role of theology in CE. Hence a search for a new relationship began.

What then is the relationship between theology and CE in the 1970s and after? Instead of offering a direct answer, Little suggested five possible alternatives:

1. Theology as content to be taught
2. Theology as norm
3. Theology as irrelevant
4. “Doing” theology as educating
5. Education in dialogue with theology<sup>20</sup>

While it is not likely that any one of the five alternatives would be accepted as “the” way to relate CE to theology, the last one would seem to be more acceptable to both Christian educators and theologians. Dialogue assumes independence of theology and of education, and permits interaction and mutual benefit between them. The dominance of education in the early part of this century and the dominance of theology in the 1950s and 1960s will likely not be repeated, and a healthier decision on CE theories and practices will be possible when education and theology are engaged in free dialogue. (Sara Little was probably right when she contemplated the future relation of CE and theology as follows: “In the final analysis, then, whatever the shape of the future, the ‘health’ of religious education is interwound with that of theology.”<sup>21</sup>)

## SOME SUGGESTIONS

From the brief review made above, we find that CE has reached a point of seeking a new relationship with theology. This can be done by way of dialogue, as Sara Little suggested. In dialogue both theology and CE can maintain their independence and both are free to think critically as to how they are and how they should be related to each other. It is in keeping with this spirit of dialogue that we proceed to talk about the future direction for the relationship between TE and CE.

There may be many factors that both make up and condition the future relation between TE and CE. There are two, however, which seem to be most crucial. One is related to the Christian educator’s understanding of the relation between theology and CE; the other relates to the theological educator’s ability to integrate CE into TE. What follows is a two-fold attempt: first, to single out some basic facts underlying the close relation between the

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<sup>19</sup> Sara Little, “Theology and Religious Education,” in Marvin Taylor (ed.), *Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p.31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.31–33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

two from a “theological point of view”; second, to recommend some practical ways to integrate CE into TE from an “educational point of view”.

## HOW THEOLOGY IS RELATED TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Theology is closely related to CE. The following four aspects of this relation are worthy of special mention.

1. *Theology as content.* One of the major tasks of Christian teaching is to communicate Christian faith. This faith has to be stated theologically. Much of the teaching carried out by a Sunday school teacher is in fact theology. When he tells the children that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he is referring to Christology; when he stresses that he who believes in Jesus will be saved, he is making use of soteriology; when he upholds the Bible as the Word of God, he confirms one of the most important theological beliefs, the doctrine of revelation. Christian education will become weak and empty if its content is not based on sound theology.

2. *Theology as process.* Theology may affect our understanding of the process of CE. “If we understand the Christian faith in terms of ethical values, we will see that process as the education of character,” says Howard Grimes. “If we see it as intellectual assent to propositions about God, we will understand the process of teaching as being largely transmission of subject matter. If, however, we understand the Christian faith as crucially a relation with God as revealed in Jesus Christ, we will seek for a process which encourages this relationship.”<sup>22</sup> Since Christian faith was understood by Christian educators in the past as mainly a matter of conversion, the process of education was therefore one of evangelism. Today in churches where the Christian faith is understood not only in terms of knowledge but also of life and action, nurture is adopted as a process of CE. If we expect CE to move toward the right direction, a right theological understanding of Christian faith is a must.

3. *Theology as methodology.* Methods used in CE today are mainly borrowed from general education and cognate disciplines. Very little has been done in developing a methodology of teaching from theology which would be especially relevant to CE. A look at recent developments in theology today, however, shows that certain contemporary theological ideas may have special implications for methodology in CE. Both Daniel Day Williams in *Current Theological Developments and Religious Education*,<sup>23</sup> and Howard Grimes in *Theological Foundations for Christian Education*, made special reference to Tillich’s “principle of correlation”. This principle means that the questions of life find their answers in the Christian faith. In other words, there is a correlation between the human needs and the Christian Gospel. This principle, if understood correctly will guide us in selecting and developing methodology for Christian education. “Any method should be ruled out,” says Grimes, “which does not in some degree confront the learner with the Christian faith.”<sup>24</sup>

The emphasis on relationship, encounter, or dialogue in contemporary theology is even more directly related to method. This emphasis suggests that the methods we must seek for CE are those that will bring learners into a personal relationship with the teacher, with one

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<sup>22</sup> Howard Grimes, *op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Day Williams, “Current Theological Developments and Religious Education,” in Marvin Taylor (ed.), *Religious Education: A Comprehensive Survey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), p.49.

<sup>24</sup> Howard Grimes, *op. cit.*, p.38.

another, with the Christian community and especially with God. If CE is expected to have a method which is uniquely Christian, a careful study of theology, particularly contemporary theological ideas would be of great help.

4. *Theology as norm.* Since theology serves as a point of reference both for what is to be taught as well as how it is to be taught—as discussed above—it functions in a normative way. This function is important to CE as it protects CE from falling into any non-Christian or non-theological trap. To be more specific, in order to keep CE truly Christian, the contributions from the various disciplines, such as psychology and philosophy need to be screened with reference to their appropriateness to theological presuppositions before they are accepted. By the same principle, curriculum materials need to be checked and church school practices need to be evaluated. If CE expects to live up to its name, it is important to accept theology as normative.

## **INTEGRATING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

As mentioned previously, a healthy relationship between TE and CE consists of two factors: first, a sound understanding and real appreciation particularly on the part of Christian educators of the close relation that theology has with CE; second, the understanding, ability and determination especially on the part of theological educators in integrating CE into TE. Unless Christian educators clearly understand how much theology means to CE and are willing to include theology in CE, and unless theological educators clearly understand how much CE can contribute to TE and are willing to include it in TE, no healthy relationship between TE and CE can be reached.

The following are some practical suggestions to show what CE can do for TE and in what areas CE can be especially useful in the strengthening of TE.

1. *In the area of objectives.* The task of TE is traditionally confined to the training of church ministers. While this professional training is still no doubt the priority in the regular programme of a seminary, the general objectives of TE may need a careful revision and reshaping in order to meet the changing needs of the church. CE, with its close relation to the life of the church, can certainly offer some guidelines and insights.

Christian education stresses that the church is not an organization of pastors *plus* some members, but rather is a fellowship of all believers *including* the pastors. The whole church has to be educated, not only the pastors, if the church is to grow properly. This is why CE today strives toward the education of all—children, youth and adults—instead of children alone as in the past. In light of this, many seminaries have already revised their objectives and programmes to include the training of laity—lay leaders, voluntary church workers, etc.—for the church.

Even in the training of professional ministers, the objectives can be sharpened if theological educators take note of what CE has discovered about the kind of professional personnel the church needs. What the church needs today is not only those who know how to preach the Word of God from the Bible, but also those who are capable of communicating the Gospel to the people effectively through other avenues such as teaching, writing, counselling and service. What the church needs today are not only those who know how to administer the sacrament to the members of the church according to the tradition of the church, but those who know how to nurture the people with wisdom and love. Above all, what the church demands from the seminaries are not graduates with either fervent heart or a brilliant brain, but servants who are spiritually, intellectually, morally and physically fit

for the work of the kingdom of God, similar to what Christian educators are today asserting, namely, education for the whole man.

2. *In the area of curriculum.* If we agree with some theological educators that “the theological seminary exists for the church; separated from the church the seminary loses its meaning and value,”<sup>25</sup> then one of the most urgent tasks confronting the seminaries is a thorough evaluation of what they teach. Christian education can certainly provide some help for this task.

Christian educators have found out that the major part of the life and work in the church is educational. As such, TE is obliged to give CE proper recognition in what is taught in the seminaries. Yet, in our previous discussion, we found that the place given to CE in the seminary curriculum was far from adequate. The simplest way to correct this situation is by offering special programmes for training CE experts and providing more CE courses for all students. There are certain subjects which should be required of all those who plan to go into the ministry, such as: a brief introduction to CE; some information on growth and characteristics of the various age groups; general method in teaching and group work; basic understanding of organization, administration and supervision of CE; and basic theory and practice of counselling.

Not only has CE to be evaluated according to the needs of the church; all other disciplines need to go through the same evaluation. In this way we may find that some courses must be dropped from our curriculum, others need to be revised and still others ought to be added.

However, curriculum includes not only the subjects taught but also much more. Just as CE curriculum is defined as “experience under guidance toward the fulfilment of the purpose of CE,”<sup>26</sup> so TE curriculum should include the experiences that will contribute the most to the training of the kind of leaders the church needs. These experiences may include, in terms frequently used by Christian educators, study, worship, fellowship, service and witness. Theological education curriculum would be greatly strengthened and enriched if the place of these experiences in the curriculum were properly recognized.

3. *In the area of methodology.* This is the area where TE can probably learn the most from CE. The fact that CE borrows methods from general education and its cognate disciplines should first of all encourage TE to learn from CE. The neglect of effective communication on the part of theologians and the emphasis on effective teaching on the part of Christian educators have sometimes become a joke. As one has put it: “A theologian is one who always make the simple Christian faith complicated; a Christian educator is one who tries to make the complicated Christian doctrine simple.”

There are a great number of educational laws, principles and concerns that have been proved by Christian educators to be very important in teaching which deserve the attention of theological educators: the interest and needs of students; the language and symbols used by the teacher; the context where the teaching and learning takes place; the laws of readiness, effect and practice in learning; the laws of the teacher, the pupil and the lesson in teaching; the learning process; the crises of conversion, of doubt and of despair; the nature of personal existence; the possibility and character of the “I-Thou” relationship and others.

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Hsiao, “The Three Great Tasks of the Theological Seminary,” *Theology and Life*, No. 1, 1978 (Hong Kong: Lutheran Theological Seminary), p.1.

<sup>26</sup> *A Guide for Curriculum in Christian Education* (Chicago: NCCCUSA, 1955), p.25.

Most of these and other educational insights that have grown out directly from modern psychological studies have contributed a great deal to the communication of Christian faith.

There are also a great number of teaching methods and skills that have been proved to be effective in CE. Some of them may prove to be equally effective in the teaching and studying of the various subjects in TE. Some of them are: seminars; counselling; group dynamics; role play; simulation games; case studies; field work; object lessons; and audiovisual teaching and brain-storming sessions. Some of these have already been widely used by theology teachers and some are yet to be tried. The important thing is not what methods the theologians use in teaching but whether they are aware that their teaching can be more effective if proper methods are employed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Theological education and CE are two of the major functions of the church. They are both independent as well as inseparable from each other. Like the two faces of a coin, they are so distinctive that they do not look alike, yet they are so inseparable that they cannot be recognized as two. Without TE, CE can be educational and even religious but it cannot be Christian. It is from theology that CE receives most of its content, finds its norm, derives its process and develops part of its methodology. Apart from sound theology there is no sound CE. It is in TE that CE can develop and grow steadily as a discipline by way of research, experimentation and interaction with other disciplines. It is also in TE that Christian educators are trained.

Equally, TE cannot function properly without CE. Apart from CE there can be theological reflections but hardly TE. Theology is meaningless if it is not clearly interpreted and effectively taught to the people by Christian educators. Theology is useless if it does not answer the many questions of life that are raised in CE studies. It is in CE that TE may find answers to a number of pertinent questions, such as whether the objectives of TE are sound, whether its curriculum is complete, and whether its methodology is effective. It is largely through CE that TE becomes meaningful to the church.

TE and CE, important as they may be, are not ends in themselves. Their ultimate task is to serve the Church so that the Church can fulfil the unique mission received from the Lord Jesus Christ, namely, to make disciples of all nations. It is out of this conviction that TE and CE must be closely related to each other, and it is on this foundation that they will eventually find the right direction of their relationship.

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# **Theological Education for the Mission of the Church in India**

**Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden**

*Reprinted from Ministerial Formation, No. 10 (April 1980), with permission*

### **PRESENT INDICATIVE**

Theological education in India is set in an institutional framework. Training for full-time ministry in most Protestant churches is coordinated by the Board of Theological Education of Serampore University. Serampore University awards degrees, but individual colleges affiliated to the board have great flexibility and autonomy in setting and examining the courses. A B.A. graduate can earn a B.D. in three years, while undergraduate entrants can gain a B.Th. in four years. Most churches make ordination dependent on holding one of Serampore's degrees, so academic studies have a high priority in the curriculum of the colleges affiliated to Serampore. Some denominational colleges exist outside the Serampore framework and bring the total number of Protestant seminaries in India to around seventy. Most college curricula are based on the class-hour system. This places heavy demands on lecturers' time, so that a college of a hundred students will be hard pressed to function even with 15 staff. Foreign staff are found in most colleges while more Indian faculty are trained. All colleges depend almost entirely on foreign funds for capital and running expenses, and via sponsoring bodies for students' fees.

### **PAST IMPERFECT**

Serious doubts are being raised now whether such a structure for ministerial training is producing either the sort of ministers that the church is looking for, or even the sort that this system of training leads the church to expect. Church leaders are frustrated because the colleges are unable to produce ministers who can motivate a congregation for evangelism or for social action. In 1978, twenty bishops of the Church of South India sent an alarmed appeal to the colleges that their graduates were neither able to act as facilitators for others, nor in many cases were they able to cope with the demands of present-day ministry themselves. These doubts have been raised about colleges right across the theological spectrum. Those who are involved in Christian ministry for development and justice in areas of poverty and injustice are also frustrated with the products of the colleges. People deeply committed to justice for the poor are increasingly finding that local church leaders and pastors show no real involvement in justice concerns. So increasingly those who want to carry on a ministry of justice concerns are being forced to carry it on outside the church and its institutions.

The college system is under fire because it is not producing the Christian ministers or leaders that the church and the context of India need. In response, the Board of Theological Education of Serampore has initiated a research project staffed by sociologists to examine the models and expectations of the ministry that are projected in the colleges and needed by the church. From examining the results so far presented by this team, we do not expect that its conclusions will give much help in curing the current malaise. For the researchers themselves assume that the locus of ministry is the entire community rather than the church as the servant of the community. In other words, there is underlying uncertainty about the relation of the church and the community, and there are unresolved theological issues about the mission of the church among those engaged in theological education.

Why are theological educators uncertain about the mission of the church in India? Why are their graduates not meeting the needs of the church?

We suggest that theological education has not been contextualized either in terms of India's poverty and injustice, or even in terms of the people of God in India. A number of factors have prevented the contextualization of theological education. First, the learning process followed in the college system is based on deductive study from principles to application; it is divorced from the living contexts which could be used as resource material for inductive study. Students pile up knowledge that is unrelated to their context and are never stimulated to relate that knowledge to that context. Such a learning process is common in many theological colleges around the world, but the flaws show most severely in India because Indian education as a whole follows a rote learning system and thus militates against inductive or creative thought.

Secondly, the content that the students are taught is imported from other contexts. The curriculum is subject-oriented rather than student-oriented. Its method is based on the number of class hours attended and assignments produced. Thirdly, the academic context of study means that mission is not central to the agenda of the educational institution or the students. Any training for Christian ministry must be in urgent relation to mission. Training in many colleges in India is seen to be training for status, employment, further studies, or access to power in the church.

To a large extent the answers to the present situation lie outside the Indian church. For this system will continue whether its products are relevant and effective or not, so long as pressure for change only comes from those within the Indian church and not from supporting bodies who are beyond the Indian context. There are signs that pressure may come on the supporting bodies from their own contexts, where world inflation is prompting some western churches to seriously question whether they can afford seminaries in their own countries, let alone support them in India.

## **FUTURE SUBJUNCTIVE**

We will not attempt to make predictions for the 1980s; that road is too illusive. Instead we will map out some futures that we would like to see occur, signs of which we can already perceive. We would like to see theological training of church leaders integrated into the training of the entire people of God and in contact with the living contexts of India. India offers such rich contexts for Christian mission. It is a country of confident non-Christian religions, where cultural issues such as caste challenge the power of the Christian message as much as apartheid in South Africa. It is a land of living debate over a wide spectrum of political options, from authoritarianism of the left and right to grass roots people's participation. It is a sub-continent where economics is not theory but life and death. At the moment none of these issues has significant Christian input. Theological education must be geared to enable the whole people of God to relate to these issues.

We see signs of this already. Extension education is growing rapidly but needs clear focusing on the local church. Development education is producing trained animators whom churches are crying out for, but the congregations need to see justice as part of the mission of the church and not as an extra. Pastors with five years of experience are clamouring for places in graduate programmes in Christian ministry, but are finding that college-oriented courses again draw them away from living contexts. These are signs of new growth and of hope, but they do not contain within them any solutions unless they are clearly integrated with the life of local churches.

How shall such integration take place? At present the seminaries stand as an intermediary between these new patterns of education and the life of the church. Some



seminaries are taking these new patterns into their present structures, and all signs are that others will follow suit. But if residential institutions try and integrate these contextually creative dimensions of education into their traditional, merely academic, and exam-oriented structure, certain results will follow. Either the seminaries will cry that academic standards are being lowered and these new models will be discredited, or these new models will be distorted to fit the pre-existent knowledge package of seminary training. Either the seminaries will totally reject these models as inadequate for ministerial training, or these models will themselves stimulate a radical change in the college-based system. What would happen if such a radical change occurred? Basic theological education in living contexts with living churches would be offered on the extension model to students attached to local churches; the method of training would be action-reflection, encouraging them to reflect inductively on their context and the resources of theology.

Specialist research and training institutions would offer short residential courses in specialist areas, such as Christian education, evangelism, development education and biblical interpretation. Courses in these institutions would be attended by trainees, lay people and pastors together. There must be input from all the body of Christ. Trainees must see motivators actually motivating lay people; they must be exposed to the experience and insights of pastors. Seminaries must be microcosms of the people of God as it actually is. They must be small and be in living contact with actual situations. The argument that the large mega-seminaries alone can provide the breadth of skills necessary in training runs counter to the theology that each member of Christ's body possesses different gifts. It is an argument based on the requirements of the omniscient pastor. Such mega-institutions have been partly responsible for alienating theological education in India from its context.

We do not imagine that the situation we have described, our analysis, or our vision are unique to India. Theological educators in the West are grappling with the same issues. The difference is that the western church has enough wealth at the moment to afford both a college-based structure of training and creative experiments. India must produce a relevant contextual model in the 1980s or continue to fail with outside support. But if radical change comes about, how will the Indian church produce theologians who are rooted in theological history and equipped with the tools of theological science to give the intellectual leadership it needs? Unless there are nursery beds to produce them, how will these plants grow? Indian church history reveals that the creative theologians who have influenced the life of the Indian church have grown and developed outside the seminary system. And a study of theology suggests that true teachers of the church must be prophets speaking from and to the context of the people of God and the wider community.

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## **Book Reviews**

### **FAITH AND CHURCH**

Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (eds.), [\*Perspectives on Evangelical Theology\*](#)  
Reviewed by Fernando Quadros Gouvêa  
David J. A. Clines, [\*The Theme of the Pentateuch\*](#)  
Reviewed by Gordon Wenham  
David Hill, [\*New Testament Prophecy\*](#)  
Reviewed by John P. Baker  
Carl F. H. Henry, [\*God, Revelation and Authority, Volume IV\*](#)  
Reviewed by Ronald Nash

## THEOLOGY AND CULTURE

Tokunboh Adeyemo, [\*Salvation in African Tradition\*](#)  
Reviewed by David Taylor  
Charles H. Kraft, [\*Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective\*](#)  
Reviewed by Alan F. Gates  
J. Andrew Kirk, [\*Liberation Theology: An Evangelical View from the Third World\*](#)  
Reviewed by Chris Wigglesworth

## MISSION AND EVANGELISM

Michael Cassidy and Gottfried Osei-Mensah, [\*Together in One Place: The Story of PACLA\*](#)  
Reviewed by N. J. Smith  
Lyle L. Wander Werff, [\*Christian Mission to Muslims, The Record: Anglican and Reformed Approaches in India and the Near East, 1800–1938\*](#)  
Reviewed by Roger E. Hedlund  
David J. Hesselgrave, [\*Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally\*](#)  
Reviewed by Myrtle S. Langley

## ETHICS AND SOCIETY

Klaus Bockmuehl, [\*The Challenge of Marxism: A Christian Response\*](#)  
Reviewed by David Taylor  
Richard J. Cassidy, [\*Jesus, Politics and Society\*](#)  
Reviewed by David R. Hall

## PASTORAL MINISTRY

Richard F. Lovelace, [\*Dynamics of Spiritual Life\*](#)  
Reviewed by Pat Dearnley  
Lee Bryant, [\*The Magic Bottle\*](#)  
Reviewed by Eddy Stride  
Roger S. Greenway, [\*Discipling the City: Theological Reflections on Urban Mission\*](#)  
Reviewed by Donald R. Davis

## THEOLOGICAL AND CHURCH EDUCATION

Lawrence O. Richards, [\*Youth Ministry: Its Renewal in the Local Church\*](#)

Reviewed by Scott Hawkins

James W. Sire, [\*How to Read Slowly: A Christian Guide to Reading with the Mind\*](#)

Reviewed by Elizabeth M. Hairfield

## Faith and Church

### **PERSPECTIVES ON EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY**

*Edited by Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry*

(Baker Book House, 1979), 289pp. \$9.95

Abstract of a review by Fernando Quadros Gouvêa, Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil.

This book consists of 20 papers presented at the 30th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, December 1978. Of special interest in the group of papers responding to liberal theologians are Bruce Demarest's response to the "trinitarian" positions of process theologians and J. J. Davis's philosophical critique of the epistemology of Immanuel Kant.

Among the papers dealing with future theological work, Klaus Bockmuehl's paper on "The Task of Systematic Theology" is a perceptive call to action and renewal, and Clark Pinnock's paper on the doctrine of God is also of special merit, though it is much too short. The papers in this group succeed in giving us a vision for the future, though they remain incomplete until some examples of the method at work and of its fruit can be produced.

The final group of papers, which address specific theological questions, vary in quality and in interest. Of interest are William Menzies on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and O. Palmer Robertson's exegesis of [Romans 11](#) (the only exegetical paper in the book) and the papers on "liberation," though these do not get down to practical proposals. As in most recent studies of poverty and "liberation," two questions of importance seem to be left open. First, while in some sense "God is on the side of the poor," it is still unclear how this fact should be integrated with the rest of Christian theology, and in what sense earlier theology is unorthodox because of its supposed lack of preoccupation with this subject. Second, few people seem to be trying to discover what are the biblical norms for action in relation to the problem of poverty.

This is a rich, full volume, well representing the breadth and depth of scholarship which evangelical theology has attained, though some of the essays need either more detailed treatment or further analysis and development.

### **THE THEME OF THE PENTATEUCH**

*by David J. A. Clines*

(University of Sheffield), 152pp. £5.95

Abstract of a review by Gordon Wenham in *Third Way*, May 1980.

So much time has been spent analyzing the putative sources of the Pentateuch and attempting to date them that relatively little attention has been devoted to interpreting it in its present form.

David Clines argues that the theme which runs through Genesis to Deuteronomy, to which all the stories are related, is that of the divine promises to Abraham and their fulfilment. He was promised three things: descendants, a special relationship to God, and land. Genesis is largely devoted to showing how the promise of descendants was fulfilled; Exodus and Leviticus to the meaning of the covenant relationship; Numbers and Deuteronomy to the acquisition of the land.

Yet in each case the promises are only partially fulfilled within the period covered by the pentateuchal history; they look forward to a future, more complete fulfilment. The opening chapters of Genesis form a backdrop to the patriarchal stories, and share with them the idea of incomplete fulfilment; the triumph of grace over sin is partial, not total.

### **NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY**

*by David Hill*

(Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979), 241pp. £6.95

Abstract of a review by John P. Baker in *Churchman*, Vol. 94, No. 2 (1980).

In this third volume of Marshall's Theological Library, David Hill not only examines the evidence in terms of the 'prophet' word group, but also ranges widely over all possible NT instances and references to whatever might be thought (albeit sometimes wrongly) to exhibit the characteristics of Christian prophecy.

Hill's method is to arrive at his own working definition of a 'Christian prophet' at the outset, more by means of a critique of other proposed definitions than from a consideration of the NT evidence, but it is a fair definition. He surveys the background in the Hebrew-Jewish tradition from Moses to John the Baptist. The New Testament is then examined in successive chapters on Jesus the prophet, the Apocalypse as Christian prophecy, prophecy in Acts, Paul and other books. This leads to an assessment of the extent to which Christian prophets would have been likely or able to adapt, recontextualize, amend or create sayings of Jesus recorded in the NT. Good chapters on 'The Decline of Prophecy' in later years and on 'Prophecy Today' complete the book.

The book would have profited from distinguishing clearly between the roles of teacher and prophet in the church. Too sharp a distinction is made, however, between the 'tongues' of Acts and 1 Corinthians, the former being construed as an address to men rather than to God. And classical Pentecostalism is wrongly said to have failed to distinguish the recognized 'prophets' in the church from the wider use of the gift on occasion by any member.

### **GOD, REVELATION AND AUTHORITY, VOLUME IV**

*by Carl F. H. Henry*

(Waco, Texas: Word, 1979), 674pp. \$24.95

Abstract of a review by Ronald Nash in *Christianity Today*, June 6, 1980.

With biblical authority and inerrancy as two of its major topics, volume IV should attract a lot of attention. Readers familiar with Henry's convictions will not be surprised to find him expounding and defending the inerrancy of the original manuscripts. Knowledgeable students of the inerrancy debate will probably not find much new in his discussion. Henry draws attention to several important qualifications that must be part of the inerrantist view. For example: "Conformity to twentieth-century scientific measurements is not a criterion of accuracy to be projected back upon earlier generations." Henry insists that inerrancy

attaches to more than the Bible's theological and moral teaching; it also extends to historical and scientific matters, at least as they are part of the Bible's express message. Henry identifies several problem passages for which he presently has no satisfactory answer.

Henry states that Christianity has nothing "to fear from truly scientific historical criticism. What accounts for the adolescent fantasies of biblical criticism are not its legitimate pursuits but its paramour relationships with questionable philosophic consorts." "What is objectionable is not historical-critical method, but rather the alien presuppositions to which neo-Protestant scholars subject it."

Henry notes that the same Spirit who inspired the Bible and illuminates the interpreter also serves as the instrument by which the truth of revelation is personally appropriated. He says that the charismatic movement is weak at the critical point of its grounding in theology and in its acceptance of "psychic and mystical phenomena without adequately evaluating them". Because it lacks an adequate systematic theology, the charismatic movement is "prone to a view of charismatic revelation and authority that competes at times with what the Bible teaches".

Henry examines the power of the Gospel on the individual and societal levels. The Christian is to apply the Gospel to social issues. Henry's study concludes with a look at God's future revelation of his glory in power and judgment when righteousness and justice will be vindicated and evil be destroyed for all time.

## Theology and Culture

### SALVATION IN AFRICAN TRADITION

by Tokunboh Adeyemo

(Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1979), 112pp.

Reviewed by David Taylor.

In this book, Dr. Adeyemo raises the most pertinent questions about traditional religions in light of biblical teaching: Do its adherents truly worship the living God? Is there salvation in the sense of personal redemption from the power and consequences of sin?

The successive chapters on worship, sin and death and destiny are the most valuable in the book. In the chapter on worship he describes several forms of offerings and sacrifices. He then analyzes the structure and purpose of sacrifices in traditional religions and concludes the section by asking: "Are their sacrifices redemptive in the biblical sense?" (p.41). He argues that only through the death of Christ is true worship possible: "This redemptive act of God is the sole ground for biblical worship" (p.47). In the chapter on sin he uses the Yoruba people of Nigeria as a case study, demonstrating that their conception of sin is an act, not a nature, and that forgiveness is community acceptance. He says: "Tradition has failed to consider the radical nature of sin and the severe, sobering penalty" (p.59).

In the final two chapters Dr. Adeyemo discusses the theological, cultural and socio-political forces influencing contemporary African theology, including the work of John S. Mbiti and Bolaji E. Idowu. In this section there are echoes of themes and arguments in the late Byang Kato's *Theological Pitfalls*. But because Dr. Adeyemo offers only a summary

treatment by comparison, the strong conclusion that one expects after the middle three chapters does not emerge.

## **CHRISTIANITY IN CULTURE: A STUDY IN DYNAMIC BIBLICAL THEOLOGIZING IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

by Charles H. Kraft

(Maryknoll: N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979; Exeter, England: The Paternoster Press), 426pp. \$12.95

Abstract of a review by Alan F. Gates in *Themelios*, January 1980.

The author's purpose is to develop 'biblically grounded theological models that will enable us to be more effective ... in communicating the Christian message in a multi-cultural world (p.12). His hope is to create a radically altered view of cross-cultural theologizing in the reader's mind.

The author states that man's perception of reality is very much conditioned by his 'cultural grid', a phenomenon which differs from one culture to another and thus results in many different mirrors of reality. He discusses the role of culture in determining the way man perceives reality. At the heart of the culture concept is man's 'world view'—a pattern of conceptualizations or perceived reality to which members assent and from which their value systems stem (p.53). World view both organizes concepts of reality and governs their application to human behaviour. Therefore, a significant change in a people's beliefs and behaviour patterns will have to begin with their world view.

Kraft probes the relationship between God who is above culture and man who is culture-bound. He rejects the view of God against culture and God in culture and opts for a God above culture but working in and through culture. He pleads for an 'anthropologically informed theology', arguing that while the forms employed in the theological truth are culturally determined, meaning and function are unchanging and supra-cultural in nature (p.118).

He introduces 'ethnolinguistic interpretation' as an antidote to the 'plain truth' approach by which one's perception of things is culturally determined and not valid for people of a different culture. Only as one wrestles with the biblical context, his own and the context of those to whom he speaks is he freed from the 'bondage of western categories' to do authentic indigenous theology (p.146).

One key idea is that of a 'receptor-oriented' revelation. The author rejects revelation as primarily a matter of 'knowledge and information', as propositional truths. Rather he sees revelation as a divine activity stimulating man to response. 'Revelation is not merely objective and complete, it has a subjective and continuing dimension as well'. Existing parameters of God's truth have been set in the Bible; future revelations will never contradict the existing record. Some readers will find difficulty with Kraft's views on this point. However, his view of the Bible as God's inspired casebook suggests a fresh approach to the Scriptures which is helpful to cross-cultural situations.

Readers will also be helped by the author's distinctions between 'form', 'function', 'meaning', and 'use' in the task of communicating cross-culturally. Function and meaning, Kraft says, are fixed and unchanging, while form is culturally determined. One of the great contributions of this excellent work is the clear affirmation that every people has a right to do theology and perceive God through their own cultural grid.

## **LIBERATION THEOLOGY: AN EVANGELICAL VIEW FROM THE THIRD WORLD**

by J. Andrew Kirk

(London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) 246pp. £6.95

Abstract of a review by Chris Wigglesworth in *Themelios*, September 1980.

The notion of a theology based on the politically sensitive concept of liberation has provoked virulent criticism from the evangelical world. Yet liberation theology is not to be ignored so easily, and Andrew Kirk's authoritative study is therefore doubly welcome, both to make up for the superficial rejection by too many evangelical pundits and also to encourage a more informed debate. Kirk, rightly I believe, considers that 'the theology of liberation marks a watershed for the continuing theological task of the Universal Church'.

A brief background survey is followed by a review of five Roman Catholic Latin American scholars: Hugo Assman, Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo, Severino Croatto and Jose Porfirio Miranda. Left out are discussions of the significant Protestant contributions of Ruben Alves, Mortimer Arias and José Miguez Bonino and interaction with Latin American evangelicals like Samuel Escobar, René Padilla and Orlando Costas.

The third part discusses the main biblical themes of exodus, creation, man, and Christ as liberator and the final 65 pages form a 'Critical Dialogue and an Alternative Theology of Liberation'.

Kirk's criticism of a lack of 'accepted' exegesis (p.95) shows his European standpoint. No European can speak *from* the Third World, though those of us privileged to have worked with the churches there want to try and speak *for* it. A better subtitle would be 'An Inquiry into Its Use of the Bible' and part of the value of the book lies in its contribution to the current debate on the use of Scripture. He agrees with Miguez Bonino that 'Western theology is deemed to have failed the Third World Churches as a relevant theological methodology' (p.205). But his earnest hope 'that theological institutions in the Third World will in the future use Western theology more as a sounding-board and limited point of reference for their own creative thought, than as the main content of their academic curriculum' (p.205) underestimates the dominant role of Western financial interests even in theological education.

Kirk argues that we must reverse liberation theology's methodological procedure. He wants 'a critical reflection on the message of revelation in the light of praxis ... without returning again to theology's classical methodology' (p.185). He seeks to identify with the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. Andrew Kirk and the publishers deserve our thanks for encouraging us to take more seriously this key issue of justice in the life of the Church and the world.

## Mission and Evangelism

### **TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE: THE STORY OF PACLA**

by Michael Cassidy and Gottfried Osei-Mensah

(Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1978), 301pp. R 4, 68

Abstract of a review by N. J. Smith in *Missionalia*, August 1979.

This assembly was the first time that Christians from every country in Africa, except two, came together and discovered what the Church is meant to be.

According to Donald McGavran, the Christian population in Africa had increased by 30 million during the past twenty years. With this unprecedented increase in the number of Christians, Christian leaders became aware of the problems, challenges and dangers threatening this continent—power struggles, racism, urbanisation, rural problems, food and health, illiteracy, economic and political problems and much else besides. Christians were searching for ways of integrating their Christian faith with their home life, their business and professional life, their civic and political life. *Together in One Place* gives an inside perspective on what was read, said and experienced at this conference. The authors have captured not only the essence of the many papers presented at the assembly, but also the essence of the discussions and individual opinions expressed during and after the assembly. This book gives a clear perspective on the Church and its relation to the major issues in Africa, such as freedom, politics, culture, and violence. For those who are sceptical about the possibility of a real reconciliation between blacks and whites in this country, this book is a *sine qua non*.

### **CHRISTIAN MISSION TO MUSLIMS, THE RECORD: ANGLICAN AND REFORMED APPROACHES IN INDIA AND THE NEAR EAST, 1800–1930**

by Lyle L. Wander Werff

(South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1977), 366pp. paper \$8.95

Abstract of a review by Roger E. Hedlund in *The Bulletin of Christian Institutes of Islamic Studies*, January–June 1979.

The author, contending that we must learn from history, provides a systematic introduction to the work of Henry Martyn, Sheikh Salih, Samuel Lee, Karl Gottlieb Pfander, T. V. French, Robert Clark, Alexander Duff, William St. Clair Tisdall and others. Over eighty pages are devoted to W. T. Gairdner and Samuel M. Zwemer. It is of interest that most of the pioneers conceived of their mission to a large extent in terms of revitalizing and energizing the ancient eastern churches so that the latter might take up their missionary responsibility towards Islam.

Does the book deliver what it promises? On page 173 the author states in a nutshell the problem of Arabia: "The socio-political environment did not permit Muslims ... to respond positively to the Gospel of Christ." And this apparently continues to be the problem, not only of Arabia, but of evangelization in the world of Islam. The author fails to develop this theme, which might well have proven the key to the question as to the appropriate Christian approach.

The failure to evaluate is perhaps the major weakness of the book. The book also tries to cover too much ground. Section two, for instance, at points seems more a history of Christian mission in general than a study related to Islam.

An exhaustive bibliography and several interesting appendices provide a valuable supplement. Over fifty pages of notes are a gold-mine of information. An index, however, should have been added.

For those who are interested in evangelization in the modern Muslim world, it is imperative to learn from history so as not to repeat its mistakes. For this purpose, *Christian Mission to Muslims* is a worthy guide.



## **COMMUNICATING CHRIST CROSS-CULTURALLY**

by David J. Hesselgrave

(Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan; The Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1978), 511pp. \$9.95, £6.00

Abstract of a review by Myrtle S. Langley in *Churchman*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 1980.

In parts I and II of this book, Hesselgrave identifies the missionary task as fundamentally one of communication. By means of skilful use of analogy, anecdote, survey and diagram, he introduces communication science, defines culture and suggests an approach to missionary communication.

Parts III to IX are based on a sophisticated diagram of cross-cultural communication, a cultural grid or screen through which the missionary message passes from 'source' to 'respondent'. This grid possesses seven dimensions which form the framework of the seven chapters: world views—ways of perceiving the world; cognitive processes—ways of thinking; linguistic forms—ways of expressing ideas; behavioural patterns—ways of acting; social structures—ways of interacting; media influence—ways of channelling the message; and motivational resources—ways of deciding.

The scope of this book, however, is too wide. It is surely better to leave the student with some principles to work through, for example, in the African culture to which he will eventually go, than to burden him with an analysis of 'the African concept of time' based on John Mbiti's (questionable) hypothesis.

I should like to see Hesselgrave or some other evangelical scholar grapple in depth with what he calls the 'Bible culture' (in his three-cultural model of missionary communication, viz. the missionary culture, the 'Bible culture' and the respondent culture) and what the Willowbank Report calls 'the cultural conditioning of Scripture'. Here lies the key to communicating Christ cross-culturally in the contemporary setting.

## **Ethics and Society**

### **THE CHALLENGE OF MARXISM: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE**

by Klaus Bockmuehl

(Downers Grove, Ill.; InterVarsity Press, 1980), 187pp. paper \$4.95

Reviewed by David Taylor.

Professor Bockmuehl begins by arguing that socio-historical explanations of the genesis of Christianity, which Marxists must provide, have not been satisfactory. But, he says: "The true dialogue between Christians and Marxists centres on the question of the creation of new men and women. That is the decisive point, not the criticism of religion" (pp.80–1).

After separate chapters on the ethics of Marx and Lenin, Bockmuehl criticizes what he calls the traditional approach to ethics based on creation order or natural law and the situation ethics of Fletcher and Robinson. In formulating an alternative, he finds in the Great Commission of [Matthew 28](#) "the first and foremost imperative of Christian ethics" (p.112): The Christian's aim is to establish the kingship of God in the world. He then suggests a

“purposive situational ethic” (p.117), in which the Holy Spirit (and not an individual or leader) is the authority who applies this aim to a particular situation to determine the appropriate action.

Finally, Bockmuehl notes the failure of Marxist attempts to use external means (education, conditioning, material incentives, indoctrination) to create the so-called “new type of man” who will submerge his self-interest for the sake of the community. “Marxism has failed to change the human heart”, he says (p.155). Instead, Christianity speaks of the “new creation,” transformed by God from within.

In fact, he says, the message of the need for this new birth “is the very key to Christian social reform” (p.166). It’s unfortunate that he does not elaborate on this statement. The link between individual regeneration and social change needs to be explored more deeply, and Dr. Bockmuehl’s discussion of communities of renewed individuals is too brief (pp.160–61). His concept of “Christian situation ethics” (p.119) also needs to be more fully developed. But these are minor flaws in an otherwise timely and lucid analysis of Marxism.

## **JESUS, POLITICS AND SOCIETY**

by Richard J. Cassidy

(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 230pp. cloth \$15.95, paper \$7.95

Abstract of a review by David R. Hall in *Evangelical Quarterly*, July–September, 1979.

Father Cassidy examines those passages in Luke’s Gospel which reveal the attitude of Jesus to social and political issues. He argues that Jesus did pose a threat to the Roman Empire. Jesus’ social ethic, based on service and humility, the sharing of surplus possessions and respect for the poor and underprivileged, pointed the way to a social order in which neither the Romans nor any other oppressing group would be able to hold sway. Yet his attitude to those in authority was one of criticism and non-violent non-co-operation, illustrated by his refusal to answer the questions of Pilate and Herod at his trial. Thus he posed a threat to Roman imperialism in the same way Gandhi posed a threat to the British Raj in India, combining advocacy of new social patterns in Indian life with a policy of non-violent non-cooperation with the British Raj, which ultimately overthrew it.

Central to this argument is Father Cassidy’s interpretation of [Luke 20:25](#): “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” But rather than referring to two separate realms, he argues that Caesar’s realm was part of God’s realm, and subordinate to it. he says that “Jesus took the position that the Roman emperor and empire were to be evaluated on the basis of how closely they correspond to the patterns desired by God” (p.78). The book contains three factual appendices on social and political conditions in the time of Jesus.

## **Pastoral Ministry**

### **DYNAMICS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE**

by Richard F. Lovelace

(Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press; Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1979), 455pp. £4.50

Abstract of review by Pat Dearnley in *Third Way*, June 1980.

The author aims to provide a 'unified field' theory of spirituality to reconcile the conflicting models of Christian life to be found within the Church. He combines his concern to sit under the authority of Scripture with an expert knowledge of church history and a firm commitment to both social concern and cultural appreciation.

The first five chapters examine the 'dynamics of renewal', leading up to consideration of four primary elements of renewal (justification, sanctification, the indwelling Holy Spirit and authority in spiritual conflicts) and five secondary elements (orientation towards mission, dependent prayer, the community of believers, theological integration and—pause for breath—disenculturation).

The section on dependent prayer points out the perfunctory approach to prayer which all too frequently characterises even doctrinally correct churches and organizations.

The second part of the book consists of eight loosely connected chapters calculated to provoke lively discussion. Lovelace's attempt at a balanced perspective on prophecies will satisfy neither charismatics nor anti-charismatics. His treatment of ecumenism and secession admirably presents the case for biblically based believers maintaining their membership in doctrinally mixed denominations. 'The spiritual roots of social concern' uncovers much useful information.

The final chapter, surveying the eschatological hope of the Church and the different approaches to millennialism will hearten all those who do not hold that the closing decades of this century will be dominated by irretrievable apostasy and secularism.

## **THE MAGIC BOTTLE**

by Lee Bryant

(Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1979), 246pp. hardcover £5.95, paper £2.75

Abstract of a review by Eddy Stride in *Churchman*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 1980.

This book by an American woman delivered from alcoholism by conversion to Christ is full of interesting insights into that form of addiction. The first part of the book, while somewhat heavy going, chronicles faithfully the alcoholic's attitude to life. Those who work in this scene will find it very informative. The second part of the book, much faster moving, relates her Bible college experience and then the ministry she has since exercised among other alcoholics.

She has some searching things to say about professional workers in the field of addiction. She has found that their very training tends to distance them from their clients. Her help came mostly from ordinary Christians who loved her and encouraged her. She is utterly against the concept that alcoholism is a disease. She is convinced the alcoholic's sense of guilt is important to his or her release from addiction. Without a moral element in their thinking, such people are cut off from the help that the Gospel and the Church can offer as the fellowship of sinners. In her own case, deliverance from drink was simultaneous with conversion, but she records the cases of others where this was by no means the case. Her experience shows that the addiction affects all social classes and the loneliest come from the wealthiest stratum.

People who have relatives with the problem, and those working in the rehabilitation field, will find this book informative and thought-provoking. Those for whom the problem is actually personal will find it full of hope.

## **DISCIPLING THE CITY: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON URBAN MISSION**

*Edited by Roger S. Greenway*

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 286pp. \$5.95

Abstract of a review by Donald R. Davis in *Themelios*, September 1980.

This volume includes ten thought-provoking chapters by scholars well-qualified by experience and study to speak on the subject. They have lived and ministered in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, and they bring to their writings examples of urban life and ministry from cities around the world. This is a particularly helpful dimension of the book.

Besides touching on the practical aspects of urban ministry, the authors deal with the deeper theological questions which must form the determining context for the Church's urban mission. What, for example, is the relationship of Christ to culture, the city of God to the city of man? Is the city the 'citadel of sin' to be avoided and even resisted by the Church? Or is the city God's goal for man even though it is in need of redemption?

The more practical issues dealt with, along with being theologically oriented, are also seen in the light of current social, psychological and urban studies. One chapter deals with church structures for urban ministry. It questions traditional patterns, calls for more flexibility and encourages small group strategy. The chapter on theological education for urban mission merits reading by every seminary instructor who is serious about relating the ministry of the church to the urban environment. The chapter on the diaconate deals with the whole matter of Christian social service and action. It points to the usual hurts of urban society and makes practical suggestions on how to bring healing.

This book is an outstanding volume; it offers intellectual stimulation, spiritual inspiration and practical guidance to those who take seriously the Great Commission.

## **HOW TO READ SLOWLY: A CHRISTIAN GUIDE TO READING WITH THE MIND**

*by James W. Sire*

(Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press), 179pp. paper \$3.95

Abstract of a review by Elizabeth M. Hairfield in *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, March 1980.

Everyone today is aware of the importance of reading rapidly. Consequently, some readers attempt to cope by learning to read at phenomenal rates, gorging themselves by swallowing every word that crosses their path. Many others, however, have given up.

This book was written to urge upon readers, especially Christian readers, a balanced approach, one which will end in neither indigestion nor despair. The author proposes selective, critical reading, which should be enjoyable, educational and an integral part of the life of every Christian.

Every chapter is independent of the others so that the reader can select those most appropriate to his needs and interests. The introduction is followed by discussions on reading non-fiction, poetry and fiction, and a discussion on the value of knowing biographical details about the author and historical, literary and intellectual details about the context of the work. The author provides a reading list—a complete course which will equip the serious student to “read virtually any work and find its place in the scheme of intellectual history and contemporary world views.”

The author, editor of InterVarsity Press, is clearly a teacher at heart. He writes clearly and elucidates his point with frequent, well-explained examples.

# Theological and Church Education

## YOUTH MINISTRY: ITS RENEWAL IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

by Lawrence O. Richards  
(Zondervan, 1979), 364pp. \$11.95

Abstract of a review by Scott Hawkins in *Christianity Today*, April 4, 1980.

*Youth Ministry* is definitely not a book with “40 gimmicks to increase your attendance at youth group”; instead it is a book of theory, of philosophy. It pays more attention to why we design youth ministry a certain way rather than how we carry out specific plans. Insights from psychology and other secular disciplines help the reader to implement a complete philosophy of youth ministry. As a result, one comes away with key insights into a biblical model for preparing for and ministering to youth.

Part three of the book guides the reader to form a three-fold stance to youth ministry. “Youth in Scripture, in Body Relationship, and in Life” become the focuses for organizing programme elements. Since Christian education is the teaching and learning of Christian faith from “life to life,” youth ministry must be perceived as youth and adults involved together in those three focuses. The perspective is biblical, straightforward and compelling.

The serious reader who participates in the chapter-ending “Probe” assignments throughout the book will find that a workable and scriptural design for planning youth ministry has been generated. *Youth Ministry* is an excellent guidebook for renewal of youth ministry, for use primarily in local churches, but also for stimulating thought at the college and seminary level.

## Journal Information

### *Publications Referred to in This Issue*

#### **Asian Perspective Series**

Published by Asia Theological Association, P.O. Box 1477, Taichung, Taiwan, ROC 400. Rate: \$1 (26 titles)

#### **Bibliotheca Sacra**

Published by Dallas Theological Seminary, 3909 Swiss Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75204, USA. Subscriptions to Subscription Secretary, above address. Rates \$6.00 per year; \$6.50 foreign (4 issues)

#### **The Bulletin of Christian Institutes of Islamic Studies**

Published by the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, P.O. Box 153, Hyderabad 500 001, India. UK subscriptions to Rev. J. S. Moon, 5 Tillyard Croft, Birmingham, B29 5AH, UK. Rates: £0.75 or \$3 per year (4 issues)

#### **Christianity Today**

Subscription Services, P.O. Box 354, Dover, NJ 07801, USA. Rates: \$18 per year; \$20 outside of USA (22 issues)

#### **Churchman**

Published by Church Society (Anglican), 69 Fleet Street, London, EC4A 3DA, UK. Rates: £5.50 per year (4 issues)

#### **Evangelical Missions Quarterly**

Published by Evangelical Missions Service, Inc., 25W560 Geneva Road, Box 794, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, USA. Rates: \$7 per year (4 issues); 3 years, \$20.

#### **The Evangelical Quarterly**

Published by The Paternoster Press, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter, EX2 4JW, UK. Rate: £4.40. USA subscriptions to Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 255 Jefferson Avenue, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503, USA. Rate: \$13.20 per year.

#### **International Review of Mission**

Published by the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, 150 Route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland. Subscriptions to Publications Office, above address. In USA, WCC Office, Room 1062, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. Rates: £6.90 or \$13.50 per year.

#### **Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation**

Subscriptions to Executive Director, American Scientific Affiliation, P.O. Box 862, Elgin, Illinois 60120, USA. Rates: \$15 per year (4 issues); students, \$7.50; institutions, \$25.

#### **Ministerial Formation**

Published by the World Council of Churches, P.O. Box 66, 150 Route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland. Rate: \$5.00 per year (4 issues).

#### **Missionalia**

Published by the South African Missiological Society. Subscriptions to The Editor: Missionalia, 31 Fourteenth Street, Menlo Park, 0081 Pretoria, South Africa. Rates: R5.00 per year Southern Africa (including Zambia and Malawi); R6.00 outside of Southern Africa, payable in Southern African currency (3 issues).

#### **International Bulletin of Missionary Research (formerly Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research)**

Published by Overseas Ministries Study Center, 6315 Ocean Avenue, P.O. Box 2057, Ventnor, NJ 08406. Subscriptions to Circulation Department, P.O. Box 1308E, Fort Lee, NJ 07024, USA. Rates: \$9 per year (4 issues); 2 years \$16; 3 years \$22.

#### **The South East Asia Journal of Theology**

Published by the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia. Subscriptions to P.O. Box 841, Manila, Philippines. Rate: \$4.50 per year (2 issues).

#### **Themelios**

Published by the British Theological Students Fellowship and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. All orders for addresses in the British Isles and for overseas subscribers to the *Christian Graduate* (available with *Themelios*) to TSF, 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GP, UK. North American orders to TSF, 233 Langdon, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA.

All other orders for addresses outside the British Isles should be sent to IFES, 10 College Road, Harrow, HA1 1BE, Middlesex, UK. Rates: £1.40 or \$3.50 per year (3 issues)

**Third Way**

Published by Thirty Press Ltd., 19 Draycott Place, London, SW3 2SJ, UK. Rates: £5.95 (12 issues); single copies: 60p.

**Trinity Journal**

Published by Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Subscriptions to Business Manager, *Trinity Journal*, 2065 Half Day Road, Deerfield, Illinois 60015, USA. Rate: \$7.50 per year (2 issues).